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Love Is a Spendthrift

MEDITATIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

Day unto day . . .

Psalm 19:2

Love
Is a
Spendthrift

MEDITATIONS FOR
THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

Paul Scherer



HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

LOVE IS A SPENDTHRIFT

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FIRST EDITION

M-K

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To my wife and daughters

To the committee

and

To my friends and students

at Union Theological Seminary, New York

P. S.

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Preface

This volume honors, on his retirement from the Brown Chair of Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in New York, a man whose zeal for the Word of God, and whose ability to bear witness to that Word in human words both beautiful and compelling, have made him one of the great Christian preachers and teachers of our age. For the sake of accuracy we must at once qualify that statement; for, as the reader will soon discover, Paul Scherer would be the last man to attribute whatever success he has had in his ministry to his own zeal or ability. To proclaim God's Word, to instruct others in the performance of that office—that is a gift and a calling, he would say, and whatever success accrues from it belongs to the One who gives and who calls, together with whatever honor may be due. Let it be said, then, that this volume is a tribute to Him who calls men zealously to proclaim His gospel, and who gives them the gifts wherewith to do it bravely and well.

Those who are familiar with the preaching and published works of Professor Scherer will know that peculiar grace with which he clothes the biblical message in human language. Each word is in its appointed place, each phrase conveys a picture: the poet is at work—in league with the preacher. It is just this quality which has suggested to us the form of the present volume. The sentences and short paragraphs collected herein have been extracted from the various published and unpublished writings of Dr. Scherer; and they are arranged in accordance with the progression of the Christian Year, so that the reader, if he chooses, may follow them, day by day, from Advent to Trinity. While each quotation is a complete thought, the whole has been ordered in a way that lends itself to consecutive study and meditation.

Those of us who assisted in compiling this volume have learned much about the Christian faith from our pastor, teacher, and friend; we express the hope that in these pages many others may be taught by him—and more: that through the carefully wrought words of a preacher, they may be led to praise Him whose good pleasure it is that faith should come by hearing . . . “And how shall they hear without a preacher . . . ?”

Douglas Hall

Robert Howard

Farley W. Snell

Marion K. Hausner

Mary MacDonald

John Mason Stapleton
Samuel Terrien

Note to the Reader

With one exception, the Christian Year is divided into weekly periods, each week being identified by the Sunday with which it begins. A glance at the table of contents will show that after Trinity Sunday, for example, there follows a series of weeks headed by distinguishing Sundays, the last being the Twenty-seventh Sunday after Trinity.

The exception to a weekly pattern occurs during the thirteen days from December 25 to January 6, when the distinctive days are not Sundays but Christmas, The New Year, and Epiphany.

Since this book is designed for perennial use, it covers a span of fifty-seven weeks instead of fifty-two, thus adapting it to the needs of any particular year. When Easter falls on its earliest date, March 22, only one Sunday occurs following Epiphany and before Septuagesima Sunday. When Easter falls on its latest date, April 25, only twenty-two Sundays occur following Trinity and before Advent. Therefore, five weeks of reading which have been provided in this book will be omitted each year, either from the post-Epiphany period or from the post-Trinity period, or, more generally, from both, depending upon the position of Easter in that year.

Similarly, Christmas may fall on any day during the Fourth Week in Advent, and Epiphany may fall on any day during the week prior to the First Sunday after Epiphany. Therefore, one or more days of reading which have been provided in this book will be omitted each year, either from the Fourth Week in Advent or from the week before the First Sunday after Epiphany, or, more generally, from both, depending upon what weekday Christmas and Epiphany occur in that year.

First Sunday in Advent

PRAYER

O God, thou who art "untamed and perilous," who dost "deal in every form of danger, and many modes of death," strip us of our pretensions and vanities; expose to the strong his weakness, and to the wise his folly but set in our hearts an unconquerable hope, and in thine own way fulfill it. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

It is far on in the night, the day is almost here. So does Paul give us his reading of current history. He is telling the hour by God's sundial, as he watches the shadow of eternity fall across the shifting surface of man's uneasy existence.

MONDAY

These hard facts we keep running into mean God! It isn't his function just to undergird! It's his function too to splinter the way we live into kindling wood! "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief." Have we time enough left to learn that our desperate need of him centers just there in the struggle that goes on day in and day out between our unbroken willfulness and his unbroken sovereignty?

TUESDAY

You may suppose that you can dodge God; but you merely get away from one place where matters are bad, to another place where matters are worse: and with the same wistful eyes staring at you. You may be unconscious of it all. You are unconscious of a good deal that goes on in this amazing universe: your return trip, for example, about the earth's axis from dawn to dawn, at the rate of something over a thousand miles an hour; not to mention that other trip year after year, with Mars and Saturn, Jupiter and Neptune, around the sun; or still that third mad rush through space in company with all the starry heavens, at who knows how many thousands of miles an hour. And you, forsooth, are eternally wanting to go somewhere!

WEDNESDAY

Human life has by some been taught to think of itself as a blob of protoplasm, an itch on the epidermis of a pigmy planet, an accident of matter, the first cousin of an ape that learned how to shave. A man has a hard time thinking of himself as he should.

THURSDAY

In the view of the Christian gospel, the dignity that belongs to man is no inherent and proper dignity stemming only from his humanity, from his awareness of himself as essentially a spiritual being; the dignity which belongs to him belongs to him ultimately by an act of God.

FRIDAY

Christianity means that precisely at the points where you like your life least you may have another: where there is a bad taste in your mouth; where things somehow have gone wrong, inside and out; left you uncertain about whether or not you want to continue living. You have felt that way. Through the world now for two thousand years the Christian religion has been hawking its wares: "New Lives for Old!" If it cannot make good there, it cannot make good, period. That is what it is about. And it is about nothing else.

SATURDAY

This earth of ours was finished millions upon millions of years ago. It circled round and round silently in the

dark—inert, forgotten, dead; until something, groping its way through the blackness, found earth's face, and stayed, and played upon it. The light had come; and with it everything that mattered came: color and beauty and life itself. So God, who once shone out of darkness, has in the face of Jesus Christ shone into my poor heart. The difference between that dead ball spinning in perpetual night, and this earth teeming with its wonders—that's the difference Christ has made for me.

Second Sunday in Advent

PRAYER

O God, who in thy Son didst come among us, and in him wilt come again, of thy mercy grant us not to shrink from thy presence, but to rejoice in it. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The Gospels see everything against the background of that final consummation which will bring the labored story of human life to its close, and which waits from day to day only the hidden counsels of God. Indeed, from Genesis to Revelation the end is always there. It is the context of every book, the undertone of every hallelujah. But it is not there as catastrophe; certainly not as meaningless catastrophe, canceling every item of the past and present, reducing it all to dust and nothingness. It is there as victory—that victory which the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ celebrate and, to say the whole truth, inaugurate, in the very face of life's dismal word *finished*. It is there to solemnize every beginning, to read every chapter as if there were no other, to see in all days the last days, to turn history itself into one great now of judgment, to make of each moment a moment of high decision in the loving-kindness of God.

MONDAY

Life will not be read—save as a ghastly and answerless riddle—without regard to its beginning and its end. Posit faith, then read events: Israel's history becomes God's history, and the history of man's salvation; Bethlehem and Calvary, the trouble he went to, and the price he paid. Events are words; but they do not always say what we think they say. The interpretation comes of faith—or of unfaith.

TUESDAY

Hear above the confused going of that multitude, asleep now under their quiet tents in the bivouac of the dead;

hear above the clamor of their voices, rising and then falling so strangely silent; hear the whispering anguish of One weary, with the dust of the road on him: "Adam—Adam!—Where art thou?"

WEDNESDAY

The havoc that tears its way through human lives comes not of God's hiding, but rather of his persistent stepping out from behind every corner just at the moment when we undertake to sneak around it in our effort to get away. Never is it true that we cannot manage to find him—I sometimes wish we would quit using that phrase. Always is it true that we cannot manage to lose him. That was Adam's problem, back there among the trees in the garden. It was Jacob's problem, and David's problem. It was the problem the chief priests and the scribes had on Calvary: not how to find him, but how to lose him. It is our problem.

THURSDAY

In the Bible the word for man—make no mistake about it—is *lost*; high and low, rich and poor, Pharisee and publican. The only difference is between the few who know it and the many who do not. Now it is a coin, now a sheep, sometimes a son; but the farthest, most immutable value any of them has lies in the redeeming Love that feels about in the dark nooks and crannies, or sets itself through the night, with its weird shepherd's call, down the steep ravine, or waits forever and a day by the gate yonder where the road runs in from a far country.

FRIDAY

Whenever God stirs himself and moves, he seems to provoke the earthquake shock and the tempest. It's rather like turning over a huge stone in the woods and watching the vermin scatter! He disturbs the greed that wants nothing better than to sit on its moneybags. He routs out all the evil things that like cover and the dark. Men with their arms flung up in their faces fight back at him. He sets the world by the ears. People say it's the devil . . . and Jesus said it was the Kingdom of God.

SATURDAY

It isn't a King we need, not at the last. And it isn't a Judge, not in the deep places where we come. In the deep places it's a Saviour we need!

Third Sunday in Advent

PRAYER

Almighty God, who of thy mercy dost ever speak to us in our perpetual need, cause to shine upon our lives in their darkness the brightness of Christ's coming, that of the wonder of thy love we may have a deep and constant joy, finding in him for all our separate, quick misgivings the peace of thine own unfailing purpose. To whom, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be glory and dominion, honor and praise, both now and ever. Amen.

SUNDAY

In our own individual lives we've grown so used to thinking of a benign and beneficent Providence, that we're quite sure, thanks to him, everything will turn out all right. All you have to do is to make up your mind where you're going, and carry the Ark of God along. "Take the name of Jesus with you." Then something happens that doesn't fit your idea of what God ought to do, and you begin to understand that before he can ever be a Friend he has to be the great Antagonist.

MONDAY

There is a sense in which God hides himself. Sometimes it is because we are looking for him in the wrong place: back in some yesterday, while he stands here beckoning toward tomorrow; or among things that we can see, such as "answers" to prayer: until one dull morning we seem to lose him entirely because he refuses to do our bidding. Sometimes it is because we carefully avoid looking for him in the right place. Over and over again he is where we are quite sure he is not.

TUESDAY

God is squarely across the road, no matter what road! We might get along better at times if he weren't. We might get away with our little conjunctions, if and but and when and after a while. We might manage to fashion an absolutely remarkable peace out of our altogether relative morals. We might manage to build a democracy out of race prejudice, and a world order out of vengeance. But we run into God the Father Almighty, as well as John Smith, on 42nd Street!

EMBER WEDNESDAY

When Jesus came, nobody much would believe that the Almighty cared anything about him; he had too hard a time! The apostles must have thought so too! It must have worried them no end, how the smile on the face of the Eternal and the grin on the face of a tiger could go together!

THURSDAY

This deliverance it is that Christ both promises and works—for the Christian it becomes the ultimate meaning of all history: whereby through the miracle of God's grace bondage is transmuted into glorious freedom; ruined hopes and tears into the order that is being hewn out of chaos, the music that is being fashioned out of sound.

EMBER FRIDAY

There are times when we talk about finding God in Christ. Infinitely truer is it that in him God finds us. We hardly dare lose sight of that, with the poor, fitful search we make, that cannot rightly be called a search, little more than a groping discontent, and a distant, formal, weary doffing of the hat. If anything ever happens in our lives, it will happen because wherever we hide ourselves, in what dark corner, there is a love that whispers and prods about there with its wounded hands: walking yonder on the streets, hungry, and someone yesterday gave him food; thirsty, and someone gave him drink; a stranger, and someone took him in.

EMBER SATURDAY

When the hymns are sung, and the responsive readings over; when the sermon is at an end, the prayers quite finished, and your knees brushed off; when the committees have all met, and the plans are all made—God writes Now over the whole thing. Keep changing what he writes, and it will read Never!

Fourth Sunday in Advent

PRAYER

What we ask of thee wisely, O God, do thou of thy great bounty bestow; with all that we so deeply need and know not how to ask: that in the knowledge of thy love we may have the peace that comes not of our striving but of thy gift. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

What is the glory of God? The majesty that had nowhere to lay its head; the grandeur that was meek and lowly; the beauty that had neither form nor comeliness that anyone should desire him; the splendor of a lonely Wanderer, weary and footsore, with nails through his hands and feet. "The spirit of glory and of God."

MONDAY

It is the coming into history of The God Who Would Be Man: acting as man's great Kinsman, vindicating the honor of his house, putting away the past like a cloud from the sky, and restoring to the land his wandering and oppressed people; within his own being that tension between Love and Holiness, Justice and Mercy, wherein stands this tragedy which was his death, and is the gospel of our salvation.

TUESDAY

It is our part in the eternal drama of redemption, not his own, that keeps God awake o' nights.

WEDNESDAY

The only time there is is God's time, and late! Shall we say that to ourselves soberly, and mean it? The Bible provides no further information. And it is God's time not because of anything we would recognize as an emergency. There are too many emergencies. Often we seem to be governed by them. There is always an emergency whenever anybody wants to do anything. God's emergencies do not look like ours. We are in the midst of one now—

confronted as we are with a Truth that insists on facing us as a Person, stalking around and laying hold of us by the arm, gazing into our eyes, so that we have to say "Yes" to it or get rid of it! Christianity is not a creed, not a way of thinking about life: it is the I and Thou of a God who addresses us; a moment of meeting, a moment for hearing and becoming. The time is now.

THURSDAY

For four hundred years and more, ever since the dawn of modern history in the Renaissance, man has struggled to know himself as man—it is almost impossible to assess the gains that have come by way of that struggle—only to have such catastrophe overtake him at last as would seem once and for all to underscore the fact that he cannot even know himself as man unless he knows himself under God. "Where there is no God, there is no man."

FRIDAY

God's final word to your life and mine has not to do with everlasting demands: it has to do with everlasting arms! This "Maker of heaven and earth" wants to say simply that he has fashioned us, and we can count on him not to forget it. He isn't going to create a human soul and then leave it without any further pains on his part to get along as best it can!

SATURDAY

Love is a spendthrift, leaves its arithmetic at home, is always "in the red." And God is love.

Christmas

PRAYER

Almighty God, who now in thy Son art ever ready to bestow upon us thy very life, give us grace so to receive thy gift that we may bear in our own hearts that immemorial pain which is thy yearning for all mankind. Through him that is born Jesus, the Christ and our Lord. Amen.

DECEMBER 25

I have found in and through him all the God I want. Nothing less than that. All that I know of God, I do not say that I have learned it from him; I say that I have seen it in him. And when I celebrate the day of his birth, I celebrate the day when God made himself so manifest that men have not been able to get away from him.

DECEMBER 26

You'll never get Christ's measure until you chart the distance which he makes possible for every man in this utter about-face from the abyss. Never will you understand what sense that turning makes until you see what nonsense it is: not because of anything that can happen to us in time, or when time itself is over: but because of what we are and what God is—with nothing now between him and us but the coming of a child in a manger, and the death of a man on a hill.

DECEMBER 27

Famine and pestilence, concentration camps, a field of battle, great ships floundering in a storm, starving generations, a cemetery in Honolulu, the dragging of a lake—while this is being written—for a young girl's body: try squaring any of it with an ultimate motive of love—unless God really does slip into this world when nobody much is looking. On one night of all nights he did it, coming down the stairs of heaven with a child in his arms.

DECEMBER 28

Whenever freedom is born, back of it now is a manger at Bethlehem. And Calvary, with its shadow; which is our light! So does the religion that begins in rescue end in a requirement set in the context of God's grace.

DECEMBER 29

It's a dreary sight this, watching men stroll around before the face of God like a committee of investigation, believing what they choose, saying this and saying that, whistling a tune, making him pay for being born in a stable. But Jesus had to risk it. And there, I think, was one of the sorrows of God which you will never be able to put into words.

DECEMBER 30

Austerity has taken the place of forbearance; magnanimity has given way to punctiliousness. There is a morbid satisfaction to be had in the process, a kind of exhilaration. Decry the human in order to exalt the divine. Depreciate self "to the glory of God the Father." "Oh, to be nothing, nothing! A broken vessel for the Master's use!" So may men turn into beasts, and God into a devil. There have been saints, "hell-bent for heaven." God became man in order that man, in his effort to be God, may not become a monster.

DECEMBER 31

How do you suppose we shall spend eternity, when so many of us seem unable to spend time?

The New Year

(The Circumcision of Our Lord)

PRAYER

We thank thee, O God, for all the wealth of past years, and for every stalwart life that without reckoning the cost has borne its own brave witness to that Eternal Truth of which now thou hast made us here both heirs and stewards. By thy grace hold us to it, that through us to our generation, and to lives that yet are not, such faith may come as that men shall dare once more on earth what thou dost promise. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

JANUARY 1

That he was different is the ground of the only hope we have. We call him not Jesus the Great: we lift him bodily out of all categories, and call him Christ, the Only.

JANUARY 2

The gospel doesn't pat the world on the back. It doesn't try to get along with the world. It wants to turn the world upside down! Did anything of the sort ever occur to you during the festivities of the Christmas season? Somewhere in the candlelight, between the carols, was there any upsetting, discordant note? Writes Matthew, "When Herod the king had heard these things he was troubled." Could it be that the only trouble God has with Christmas is that it troubles us so little? We set it to music, but we seem more than a little shy about setting it to work! With its preference for the commonplace and the humble. That isn't *my* preference! And the love that comes not as Lord but as servant. That isn't the role I choose to play! The only shelter he offers me leaves me wide open! "Follow me!" There seems to be no remedy for it but some annual ritual of interment with robed choirs!

JANUARY 3

It began in Bethlehem and came out on Calvary. And you remember how your pride used to hold you back, and your ambition, and the stubbornness of your mind. Until you come upon him in life's most desolate places, there before you ever reach them, waiting for you to catch up, and the hours you thought you'd have to go through alone seem

like home to you as you draw near with a fire burning, and food spread on the table, and rest for the night.

JANUARY 4

We live in the moral order which he fashioned, and that order makes his kind of sense. Not always our kind; his kind. In that order the issues of living are not held out to us as promises, or thundered at us as verdicts. They are the inevitable outcome of living in a world where law does not simply emerge; where it is a will.

JANUARY 5

If the gospel means anything it means that at the heart of Christianity there is Christ. Just as at the heart of the universe there is God. And as at the heart of religion there is a man standing on his feet in that power beyond his own, purified and redeemed.

Epiphany

PRAYER

Silently now we would open our hearts to thy presence, which is our hope, and all the beauty of life is its shadow. Teach us thy truth, and grant us to bear ourselves highly in it. Bring us to show mercy, as thou art merciful. So let thy mind be ours, through him who is thy love to us. Amen.

EPIPHANY: JANUARY 6

It begins to dawn on you that you cannot call Herod Herod any longer. This wretched child has come to disturb all of us. He wants to send you out on this most disappointing of all the quests in which humanity has ever been engaged—and the most exhilarating. He shows you that self of yours, until you can hardly stand to live with you; and when you are willing at last to get out and away toward the star, he talks to you about peace—the peace of sin forgiven, and you still sin!—about joy, the joy of being forever uneasy, because he has taught you to care, and nothing anywhere is as he would like it to be!—and about hope, but hope enough only to throw up your head, no matter what happens, and cry, as an eagle soars to meet the sun,

“Lord God, Thy will be done!”

MONDAY

Not beauty; truth! You can turn John the Baptist into a gentleman if you like, by making him proper and comely; but gentlemen are bad swaps for prophets, nowadays at least! “Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

TUESDAY

It is precisely by the road of our own despairs, our failures, and disappointments that we have come to think of God as if he were indifferent. We have run up against his steady faithfulness so unceasingly—this God of Amen, as the prophet calls him, making you think of Jesus with his “Verily, verily, I say unto you”; we have

been groping around blindly at the center of things for so long, trying to find some brand of almighty flexibility, only to get in our hands over and over again nothing but the feel of his greathearted constancy: that we have adopted the mood of conciliation every time we turn our faces toward him. Maybe his is the kind of rigidity that will yield, if only we keep after him; ply him with honeyed words; sing him the song of the Sirens, incite, incline, induce, dispose, turn the scales. And nowhere, on earth or in heaven, is there such a God! That is heathenism, pure and simple. The God with whom we have to deal is not only willing: He is eager and waiting. That is Christianity.

WEDNESDAY

"Jesus hid himself."

The bold thing I am going to do is to ask a question. Where would you hide if you were God?

Surely not in yesterday alone, but in today, in tomorrow, if you wanted to keep men traveling. That certainly. Then I think in things unseen—in the courage it took one day to put aside a glittering wrong and reach out for a dull-looking right; in the old intolerable dream I saw a woman pick up once more, after she had laid it away for years; in the love with which a man set about atoning, a year or two ago now, for the harm he had done; and in the kind of love which has little atoning to do, but goes about spending itself in its home and on the streets; in the clean, hard choice of a pure life, and a kind spirit, and a bearing that disappointment serves only to make gentle. Yes, there I should hide if I were God, and in that brave hour when any soul of man may spread some sail of faith and slip away

from the low and level shore lines of common sense, toward the great deeps, and the things that ought to be.

THURSDAY

I protest this constant, reiterated, everlasting phrase, "finding God"; in duty, in people, in books, in stones and running brooks, in everything! I wish we would all forswear it. Let us speak rather not of "finding" but of "being aware." He is playing no game of hide-and-seek, however much life looks that way. It is not his hiddenness; it is our blindness. I have never heard that he was lost. If he is, space is much too large, and eternity is much too long, for me to do much finding! Seeking him in nature! You may as well seek me in the doll's house I built once for my children. I should not like you to get from that your idea of me. My children knew me first, so they loved it!

FRIDAY

Simeon and Anna didn't even live into the angry dawn of their world's new day. The first faint glow of it was all they caught; but they were willing to leave it at that, and die as men have died from time immemorial, with no other certainty than this bare edge of a vision. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." I can't help thinking of Christ's own whisper on the cross, "It is finished"—when to all appearances nothing had even begun! There was only a hint of God, a nod, a glance—but they got it; because they knew, as Jesus knew on Calvary, what God was like: that he would always be alive, breaking through in quiet corners; that he would always be standing most surely in the very center of things most desolate.

SATURDAY

The only answer to the riddle is the face of Jesus, which somehow refuses to fade from the picture that the ages keep throwing up against the sky. It's all there is to say to the man who is fighting his way along against some crippling infirmity. It's all I'll ever have to say to anybody who is beset with painful memories, at dread-ends with himself, standing in front of a blank wall with his strength gone and nowhere to turn. It's all I have to say when remorse settles down over a soul, or the shadows of death steal up silently. It's all I have to say when the world goes mad again. With that face there, the love of God doesn't seem to me to be a silly, unreasonable fancy, trying to look pretty no matter how ugly the things are that happen; it seems like Creation's heart beating against my own, as far down under the assault and burden of life as I am, every bit as far down.

First Sunday After Epiphany

PRAYER

Every word of thine, O God, is thy very deed. We don't have to plant our feet and try to hold back against it any longer! Reveal to us thy will, which is the nature of things, and our commandment. And turn the burden of our obedience into a song. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

What we have to deal with in the Bible is more than a record; it is a revelation. It is not the story of humanity's quest for God. It is not even the story of God's quest. As all through the past he has continued to manifest himself to the community of his people, so now he takes up what has been written here to make of it his own redeeming act in Christ; showing us who we are, and what we are, and where we stand; giving life a meaning beyond any meaning we could have discovered or fashioned for ourselves; bringing us to deal seriously with the good that he has ordained, and the evil that we are forever making of it; speaking to us soberly and insistently of the direction we are taking, trying to spell out for us, beforehand, our destiny.

MONDAY

Where did we get the idea of the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild"—except that we are forever intent on seeing not what is there but what we want to see there! The peace he brings is itself a "scandal." The healing is a wound. The only shelter we have is on "the stormy north side of Jesus Christ." Why did we ever suppose that the words he spoke, by the inherent magic which we think belongs to truth, would inevitably validate themselves to any honest, forthright mind? The world has been busy for twenty centuries twisting, adjusting, adapting what he said to make it intellectually respectable, and demonstrably practical, only time and again to give over the whole sorry business, shrug its shoulders, and take off after its own devices. There is something more serious going on that does not lend itself to pastel shades.

TUESDAY

We are set down squarely in the middle of a place that's absolutely full of bewilderment. Our own little excursions into the surrounding dark have served among other things to increase its circumference. They say that primitive man was religious because he couldn't understand what was going on. I doubt if that leaves us with much ground for being irreligious.

WEDNESDAY

Men go stumbling about blindly before the face of God's continual presence, wanting to know where he is: he who is as near as any lingering thought they have, though vast beyond it; close as the air they breathe and the words on their lips, pressing upon them in the touch of some hand, shining into their eyes with his accustomed light. But these they pile up and say are common things, too common. Common as the steam spurting from under the lid of a kettle. Thousands had looked, but James Watt saw it. Common as the drift water on the shores of Portugal. Thousands had looked, but Columbus saw it, and it spoke to him of another world across the sea that waited for his coming.

THURSDAY

God never has been in the habit of making a show of himself. He's a dream in the night; an angel wrestling with Jacob by a brook, but gone in the morning; a whisper, the sound of marching off-stage, footprints. "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself."

FRIDAY

The death of Jesus was either a tragic incident, which meant that his kind of life was futile and impotent and would be broken at last by a world that was too much for it, or it meant that mercy and justice and peace are so closely akin to the Eternal God himself that they can be nailed to wooden beams and still win!—wiped out, and they'll come back!—buried, only to break death itself wide open.

SATURDAY

If we ever begin finally and fully to think about ourselves as mankind instead of as men, we are going to drop clean out of our lives the best values that life has. You lose sight of God, and the whole meaning and purpose of your separate and distinct existence here on earth slides away, until the best that can be said of you may be written on a placard in a museum, *Genus homo sapiens*, variety Caucasian! . . . which is to say you are an intelligent white man. That's all. You are a zoological specimen, with a cosmic chill. This is one of the differences Christ has made. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

Second Sunday After Epiphany

PRAYER

Show us, O God, as much of thy purpose, because we have it, as shall steady us. We do not ask that the way be made smooth, or even that thou wouldst bestow upon us now the strength which thou hast promised. We ask only for the grace to use what thou hast already provided in Christ Jesus. Amen.

SUNDAY

They tell me in the books that Christianity was an ascetic creed, a creed of withdrawal from life. It was, when it got out of the New Testament: but not before! In Jesus of Nazareth it held out its hands and threw its arms around every ugly thing on earth.

MONDAY

Assume that the wrong which goes on clinging so fiercely to you isn't on the surface; that it runs deep, and you're in it all your days: but assume too—as the Bible assumes—a readiness and a power in God which make it impossible that his purpose in your life should ever be finally defeated except by your own will to have it so. Set him, not yourself, against the evil. And you'll find that he isn't somebody you've heard about or read about or seen on the cover of the Gospels. He's real.

TUESDAY

"Blessed are the poor in spirit and the pure in heart. Blessed are the merciful and the meek." It sounds lovely. It's the tense and knotted anguish of the Eternal—like a man digging his feet into the ground, pushing forward with both palms held flat against tyranny and injustice and all evil speaking—these things that tear our lives apart; against sorrow and despair and all loneliness. It's God leaning his weight against the world through us in Christ.

WEDNESDAY

Christianity is a religion of reward. It rewards responsibility faithfully discharged with added responsibility. It

rewards the man who is steady under tribulation: he grows patient. It rewards the man who is patient: he becomes conscious of having weathered the storm. It rewards the man who weathers the storm: his is a profound conviction. It rewards the man of profound conviction: he is never disappointed.

THURSDAY

And with his breathless awareness Jesus kept wondering how anybody could forget that Other—with the flowers there, and the birds against the sky, and the sower in the field, and the leaven working behind the stove. God caring day in and day out, giving the round earth sun and rain and food for all the hungry souls that walk its streets—while men shut up his bounty to make a living for themselves.

FRIDAY

To this riddle of life there is no answer that's full and complete: no answer at all but that God is still making his way through the thick of it, with his own inscrutable love, and the glory of a dying Nazarene shining austere out of every ill my flesh is heir to.

SATURDAY

Seeking first the Kingdom of God isn't the pious exercise of a man who is unusually religious and a little peculiar: it's the road anybody can take into the only ultimate fulfillment life has to offer.

*Third
Sunday
After
Epiphany*

PRAYER

It isn't the way out that we would seek, O God:
it's the way through. Give us thy hand in it, as thou
hast given us thy hand on it. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

Faith was what got them into trouble. It was a Holy Presence that more and more towered upon their lives. It was the continuous and urgent invasion of One who generations gone had led them out of Egypt, long ages gone had fashioned the very world itself after his mind, and for all their forgetfulness through the years had never dealt with them after their sins nor rewarded them according to their iniquities! Nothing had happened to the facts of their tough existence.

Something revolutionary had happened to the interpretation of the facts. The facts were still there, and they were still unchanged; but they were facts under a stately rule that rested over human history and made sense of it; kept it from being ridiculous and futile; shaped it fore and aft; and from under that strong and tender rule no living human soul could ever get clean away! They were there by the rivers of Babylon; we are here: because there's a will of God in this matter that has to be served.

MONDAY

We do well to sing "Before Jehovah's Awful Throne." But have you ever noticed how utterly incongruous the second line seems? "Ye nations bow with sacred joy." The "awful throne" and the "sacred joy" hardly belong together, do they? They wouldn't have, if Christ hadn't moved toward us out of eternity, holding in one hand the reins of divine judgment, and in the other all the mercy God has in his heart for human life.

TUESDAY

There was a Master once of life. He spoke of it in terms of beauty, reverently; he lived out its immortal destiny

for it with clear and lofty grandeur, carrying it unhurt through death; men saw him do it, and wrote it down. Since then nobody has had to suppose, or presume, or hazard the guess that life after all may be a very great thing. It is, or else you have to get rid somehow of this troublesome Galilean. And that you cannot do. What he said and what he did will not let go. It is just there, today and tomorrow, to keep every man's sneer from making sense.

WEDNESDAY

Forever lurking about somewhere in the shadows is a question. Most of the time we keep it tucked away out of sight and hearing. We just stare across the rooftops, or down the street at the whole incredible business, seeing what we still are, and what the world is, with all that's so crooked and should be straight, and all that's so wrong and could be right. Once in a while it does break out into a whisper that may well be like an agony on a man's lips: "*Art thou he?*"

Just don't ever be afraid of it. He occasions it himself you know, simply by not fitting into life as we know it to be.

THURSDAY

Have you ever heard it said that some people just won't listen to reason? Never say that of anybody in such a surprised tone of voice, or act so hurt about it: reason is the very last thing any of us listen to; and even when we do, it makes very little difference. By the same token, when something goes wrong, really wrong, don't ever be content simply to snap your fingers and say, "Why on earth was

I so stupid?" Stupidity isn't this world's primary problem. I wish it were! A man may be as bright as a dollar, and still where life is concerned be anything but up to it.

FRIDAY

From under the brows of the Nazarene, the Eternal God looked long into man's tragic soul; spoke to him—it was like the first sane speech a madman hears when he is clear of his madness; said radiant things that swept across his clouded mind as the sunshine sweeps across a meadow; took him confidently by the hand, quite sure of the future; led him to a cross and died for him there with a gallant whisper, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise"!

SATURDAY

Now Balaam the wise man saw not the angel of the Lord. But the ass on which he rode saw, and stood still! It may be that our knowledge is but a tiny island in some unspeakable mystery of sea, and that the plain man after all is right who kneels very quietly and prays, "Our Father, who art in heaven!"

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

PRAYER

Teach us to walk humbly before thee, O God, for all that we know thee so familiarly in Christ Jesus. And may we never sit down safely in the victory thou hast so dearly won through him, lest sitting there we come to think but poorly of it. We ask this for his name's sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

Revelation is not the unveiling of something that was hidden; not the record of what happened long ago across the sea among a strange people: but God's invasion, whatever form it takes; and the sooner we quit thinking we can confine it to a book the better. It isn't simply God's manifestation of himself: he imparts himself.

MONDAY

One world with another to attend it. The Word addresses the world. The world struggles with the Word. The Word manifests its power in the world. But always its power is a hidden power. There have always been facts, insistent, brutal facts, to contradict it. There never has been any conclusive, external evidence that the gospel is true. In all conscience, there is little enough about any of us here to make anybody drop his knitting and take to reciting the Apostles' Creed!

TUESDAY

That you can't get away from the facts is one of our modern fixations. A certain carpenter from Galilee kept on doing it from morning to night, disregarding them and getting away from them! Simon, the hearer? No! Peter, the rock! Levi, the publican? No! Matthew, the saint! If a man has anything in him at all he knows that he is here to change the facts!

WEDNESDAY

One glimpse of those hills where righteousness dwells, of those rivers of God's mercy rolling down to an eternal

sea: one glimpse—and we may not even know how it happened; but we are whole again! Life has come into its own, got its bearings; it's different, because once more it has stumbled against eternity, and lifted its hot face if only for a moment toward the cool, the wide and endless corridors of a Father's House. We were made for that.

THURSDAY

"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!" Or is there something more blessed still: the blessed disturbance that comes of being his?

FRIDAY

I wonder sometimes if the very things which would now almost argue God's absence from the world will not show us someday, more clearly than anything else, his presence in it! That's how it was when Jerusalem was a desolate, smouldering heap of ruins, and the people of Israel sat by the lonely waters of Babylon singing their sad songs, only to have every word stick in their throat with a sob. If you wanted to pick out the one half-century of all their long history when the brooding Mind of the Eternal was palpably near, that would have to be it! And down the years on a naked little hill where three crosses stood like gaunt specters bearing their poor human freight; and a man cried out as if he were forsaken; but whispered at last, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Where else can you hear the deep Heart of the world beating, inside created things? What man saw as the symbol of their forsakenness was itself the sign of an unsleeping Provi-

dence! Everything was where it always had been—in the might of God; and where it was, it was safe.

SATURDAY

When everything looks just right for a miracle—your need over there, and God's power over here—but something seems unaccountably wrong, and the issue is postponed, could it be that just there and then the wisdom and the love of God are stubbornly at work? That he's never so idle as he seems, nor so silent as you think?

*Fifth
Sunday
After
Epiphany*

PRAYER

Lead us, O God, into the secret place of thy presence, that having seen thee in Christ we may love thee, and having loved thee may fashion after thy mind this place where thou has set our feet. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

God's good news is simply that we are invited to meet him in the intimacy of that restored relationship in Christ which is faith, where requirement goes hand in hand with rescue, and mercy goes hand in hand with judgment; where love, if it were experienced as law, would cease to be love, and law, because it is experienced as love, ceases to be merely law.

MONDAY

If the gospel comes to us not so much as history but as conflict, not so much as succor but as demand, then it comes also not primarily as an invitation to patient reliance upon God, but as a summons to ceaseless participation in his eternal and redemptive purpose.

TUESDAY

Forgiving seven times seven? Seventy times seven! And still no rightful claim on God's favor! He "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." The gospel is deep enough down to offend, and far enough in to hurt: where the quick is, and the needs that have to be stirred into consciousness before any need except the body's can be met, before life can issue out of death. Proximate answers to proximate concerns are all too often thoroughly fraudulent answers. There is no *ersatz* for the disturbing gospel of a redeeming God!

WEDNESDAY

It may well go without saying, and perhaps it should, that what the gospel always has in mind is "to comfort the distressed." What may not go so well without saying is that it never undertakes that role prematurely. It is equally concerned "to distress the comfortable." Jesus never occupied himself with the way out. One might think that he was intolerably cavalier about that. To him it was the way through that mattered. It was not with him as with us the problems of living that loomed so large; as Bonhoeffer somewhere points out, it was the problem of life. It is this ultimate bewilderment, this ultimate alienation, this ultimate anxiety that the gospel addresses; and the gospel addresses it by increasing it! Freud, with a distaste which almost amounts to nausea, calls religion an "irrational delusion": man's assumption that he is invulnerable, immortal, backed up by the Almighty. But where in the Bible is that? If he is backed up, he is backed up into a corner!

THURSDAY

In the gospel we are never allowed to lose sight of the paradox of dust and divinity which we are: to forget the devil within is to become a fool saying in his heart, "There is no God"; to forget the angel is to become a cynic, whose curse it is not even to believe in man.

FRIDAY

For the Christian, heroism is no gaunt thing which simply faces the odds and outstares them. The Stoics used to manage that. It is a spirit which, leaping against the

world, has discovered that God is indeed standing by: but not as one who looks on idly and does nothing; as one who holds himself in readiness to run up at a gesture and throw in all he has! Until from that sovereign hand, out of the evil itself, not in spite of it, comes good; out of the very darkness, light; out of the pain, healing.

SATURDAY

“Thy son liveth.” Where’s the profit, then, tell me, in trying to get away, when it’s not only love, but that Love from which we keep holding back, asking, “How can these things be?”—fending it off, “Art thou greater than our father Jacob?” Are we afraid because of the threat and the claim? They are the way God has of saying that life itself is at stake—if anybody wants to live it “all the way up.”

Sixth Sunday After Epiphany

PRAYER

Thou wouldst have us ask of thee, O God, whatsoever we will. Above all else we ask of thee thyself, thou who hast never yet lost hope for any one of us, though thou knowest us altogether. Seal upon us the image of him whom we worship. Gather up all our doubts and uncertainties into the meaning which thou alone canst give to our lives. Make perfect in our weakness thy strength, and in the midst of all our anxiety bestow upon us that costly peace of thine which can be ours only as thy will becomes our will. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SUNDAY

There is a *will* then at the center of things, like a circle drawn in the middle of life. Around that circle from the same center in God is drawn another. It is the circle of God's *judgment*: so that nobody, nobody is ever able to break out of the first without running headlong into the second. If you choose to stop within that circle, it is your lookout. But beyond it is a third, drawn more widely still: the circle of God's *grace*, which somehow like two great arms includes the rest: so that one cannot break out from under his judgments without running headlong into his compassion. This is the framework of history, the very structure of that sure and deep reality with which we have to deal.

MONDAY

I want something impossible like this: God when the clock isn't striking, and nothing is going on but the patter of feet on the sidewalk, and the monotonous grinding of wheels in their ruts! God when nobody at all is paying any attention.

And that's precisely what you have right to the end of the gospel. Just a heaped-up mass of little things that you and I want to get by somehow. They seem to lie so heavily on us, make us fretful and impatient: and the sum of them is life! A carpenter's bench, a lake, a highway, and a hill. Homes where Death has been, and the blinds are drawn. A wedding, a supper, and a woman by a well. Men fishing and sowing and building and reaping. People in pain. A father who has lost his boy, and wanders out at evening-time to watch for him down the long shadows. That is the stuff God took up in his hands. And we brush it off, and say that we're sick of it, and that none of it amounts to anything! Why doesn't he give us something that's really

worthy of us, and not this tiresome rubbish that chokes up all our time? And God made Jesus out of it—out of common days like yours!

TUESDAY

One is often amazed at the assumption that everything Jesus said is easy to understand. But what item is there in the record more insistent than this: that Jesus was being constantly misunderstood?

WEDNESDAY

The important fact is not that Christianity provides us with general principles. The important fact is that it doesn't ask us to go around applying them to one predicament after another, to this situation and then to that: waving in the face of every current event the Sermon on the Mount; hanging up a motto for the capitalist who sits in the office, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you"; and displaying over the door of the factory a set of maxims for the laborer who comes in with his lunch, "Be not anxious for the morrow," "Be subject to your masters with all fear." The Christian life never boils down to a simple question of what is written in the record. It's always a question, wherever you are, of the Christ who meets you there; and the Word he speaks then, and the cleansing deed he does in your soul, and the swift and following movement through your life of God's!

THURSDAY

You hear it said sometimes that the Great Commandment sets forth the sum and substance of our religion. It

doesn't at all. It sets forth only the sum and substance of the part we can play in it. The part God plays in it is more than a little necessary! And the part he plays is prior to this in importance, and being from all eternity, is antecedent to it in time. "God so loved the world that he gave . . .!" You've got to write that in ahead of everything else if you want anything at all. "Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." Get them back, these two commandments, where Christ put them, in front of a cross.

FRIDAY

There is much in this queer world that God cannot do without contradicting himself and the whole wide universe. Quarrels cannot be stopped until men are ready to stop them. People cannot be made good until they want to be made good. The wickedness of evil lives cannot be kept from spilling over and hurting the innocent, or airplanes from dropping bombs on children, or shells from bursting and killing somebody we love. God got into all of it on Calvary, just so that he could go on being God forever without asking or needing anybody's permission or forgiveness. His glory is not so much in a "devouring fire on the top of the mount" as in the compassion that made its way down a steep hill toward a city, and wept.

SATURDAY

There are citadels in the human soul where power cannot come, only weakness can get in.

Septuagesima Sunday

PRAYER

For every mercy of the past, and for thy presence still, we praise and bless thee, O God: be thou yet our guide and our one sure hope forever. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

There stands One who came to a manger in Bethlehem. Thirty years he waited. Even then there was no crown to be had for a leap. In the wilderness the devil whispered to him, "Hurry!" But there was to be a cross first. It was God's road, and it was long and roundabout, and it ran far away, and out of sight, toward "the spires on the world's rim."

MONDAY

The gospel didn't get up out of a featherbed to yawn its way sleepily through the earth; it got down off of crosses, came stalking up out of fire, with the smell of the flames on it.

TUESDAY

That's why we have so little of the spirit of pioneers, pushing on into undiscovered country: we are too much under the *tyranny* of the *possible*; and then we hope to have some fellowship with this Jesus of Nazareth, who, when a thing is possible, loses interest in it almost at once and looks at you breathlessly, with his eyes all kindling, to see whether you are going to stop with what you *can* and sit down there by yourself, or come over where he is and start what's beyond you!

WEDNESDAY

"Is the Lord among us, or is he not?" the people said to Moses. In its crudest form it's the demand that somehow the covenant God has made with us should pay off. "Let's

have a little ‘What’s-it?’—“manna” in Hebrew: this bread we’re after, the results we’re looking for. . . . “We have forsaken all”—well, not quite all!—“and followed thee”—at some little distance, it’s true; but “What shall we have therefore?” No what-you-may-call-it? No manna? The Adversary in the Book of Job shrugs his shoulders, puts his tongue in his cheek, kicks up the star dust, and gives it out as his opinion that no man will serve God for nothing. And no man has to! You don’t, I don’t, if we will quit plucking at God’s sleeve—not for some word that comes out of his mouth, but for something that can go into ours!

THURSDAY

A man doesn’t go to Gethsemane lightly. He doesn’t put up a cross for collateral when what he says is guesswork! All through this story there is sweat on God’s forehead, and the rippling of muscles that ache under the skin! If there is a word on Christ’s lips about forgiveness, he means it; by all his fasting and temptation he means it! If there is a word about the victory he can give you, the soul he can make of you, poor and prodigal as you are, he means it; by all his agony and bloody sweat he means it! If there is a word there about his companionship on the loneliest of ways, by his cross and passion, by his precious death and burial, he means it! I don’t care what your circumstances have been, or what you have been, either—been or done, for that matter—I don’t care, not when God dares you with his own signature to be one of his redeemed!

FRIDAY

The Bible punctuates human history. It confronts human life with its scrutiny, question mark. It holds out in both

hands its revelation, period. It records humanity's choice, exclamation point: "And they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!" Either that, or "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" While after everything that is written stands a comma, the symbol of humanity's destiny, never fully complete, always "to be continued."

SATURDAY

What is so lovely in the gospel? "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, whited sepulchers that appear beautiful outwardly but within are full of dead men's bones!" Is that lovely? "If your right eye offend you, pluck it out." Is that lovely? "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." How lovely is that? There is something saccharine about our butterfly-chasing, and the religion that goes sniffing about for comfort instead of for the sharp, soul-cleansing truth!

Sexagesima *Sunday*

PRAYER

Grant us, O God, so utterly to believe in thee and in thy good and unchangeable purpose, that believing we may by our lives bring back upon the earth, for its darkness, light; and for its sadness, that glory which need never have vanished. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

When he prays, a man must risk growing more like Jesus of Nazareth; and being like Jesus of Nazareth in a world like this is not a prospect to be viewed with composure. To love where Love is crucified; to be unselfish where the crowd will take advantage of your unselfishness, cheat you for being honest, and hurt your feelings for showing yourself affectionate! What if God should answer your prayer as you stand naked and alone before him, risking what you are on what he is!

MONDAY

The entire Christian revelation presupposes what we are, and on the other side of it the grace of God! There the gospel starts, with its preaching of repentance; and there it comes out, with its doctrine of the last things. The stuff of human life and of human history was on hand for everybody to see. Jesus could hardly have understood less about it than Paul. But the will of God was back of it, and the will of God was underneath it, and the will of God was the goal toward which it was moving! Within that will stood publicans, and sinners, Levi and Mary of Magdala; Peter and Thomas and Judas.

TUESDAY

Here is Love at the divine level, never mind the cost. And on the instant we come within sight of the last word the gospel has to say about the life full-statured in Christ. At the heart of that life is a Love which leaves its arithmetic at home and taking up into his hand a statute, makes of the statute a song. You cannot argue with it, prove that

it never will justify itself in history, and so get it to quit because the whole thing is unreasonable. It cares not a snap of the finger for reasons. No use asking it why it keeps on. It hardly knows how to answer. Not just because God said so; that much is sure. It was not born of a commandment. It does not belong in the category of obedience. It belongs in the category of gratitude.

WEDNESDAY

And so this New Testament, to keep you from seeming too large, stands you up, not by the side of immensity—after all, what does that matter?—but by the side of Love. And you can't see how long it is, or how broad; you can't see how high it is, or how deep! It goes trailing its gigantic shadow down little lanes in Palestine, and across the threshold of a widow's home. With its hand it touches everything it sees, making no parade, eager to believe the best, never mindful of a wrong, knowing how to be silent. And at last it lays out its young arms on a beam of wood, and answers the first stroke of the hammer with a prayer under which this eavesdropping humanity of ours has been peeping about ever since—God whispering something to make every man's grave dishonorable: "Father, forgive them." I for one can stare light years and interstellar space between the eyes without being very much upset; but I can't stand in front of that and put my thumbs in my armholes! I have overheard God once, and lost a good deal of my stride.

THURSDAY

The havoc that tears its way through human lives comes not of God's hiding, but rather of his persistent stepping

out from behind every corner just at the moment when we undertake to sneak around it in our effort to get away. We say that he reveals himself to us. Revelation covers no more than half of it. There is a brand of downright stubbornness with which God keeps cutting across the road. Each of us is either the willing or the unwilling agent of that final sovereignty, still at liberty to reject him, and so to destroy ourselves; but not at liberty either to avoid him or to defeat him.

FRIDAY

To watch Judas there is like gazing out over a poor, scarred battlefield, with nothing left to show for all its once fair promise but lifeless, gaping wounds. "I have sinned." It is like a publican's smiting on his breast without being bold enough to lift up his eyes and pray. It is his *Miserere Nobis*, his litany from the farthest place to which life can get away from God. "In that I have betrayed the innocent blood." It is his worshipful hail to the best he has ever seen, those long sea miles yonder from his desert here! A sort of *Te Deum Laudamus* from hell! He was a betrayer, but by his very betrayal was betrayed. Sin always does that. The only thing left now was to destroy the self that had betrayed him.

So off somewhere in the distance there was a soiled and homemade gallows; while there on Calvary stood a clean cross for One who had done nothing amiss. Is not the meaning of it a mercy that can reach all the road between? There is another way to destroy the self that betrays us. The secret of it is still with Jesus of Nazareth. It is what he died to do—that carpenter whose love outstrode Judas, and with a God-lonely kiss built a symbol of hope on the world's altars.

SATURDAY

Prayer is petition; but brave petition. "Our Father who art in heaven. . . ." There is a gallantry about it. Here are petitions that hold up their heads. They will not stoop or whine or dodge or fend off or cringe or let their teeth chatter with a beggar's fear. They march along in unbroken ranks from a name into a kingdom, with a will, through bread and trespasses and temptation and evil, to a power and a glory forever.

Quinquagesima Sunday

PRAYER

We thank thee, O God, that thou art never at home with us. Thy love is always discontent with our lives. Give us of thy grace such power over all those things which make us uneasy in thy company that more and more we may find ourselves at home with thee. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

I submit to you—if we're going to be pessimistic, let's be pessimistic about the right thing! That may at least give us the clue we need to life: not that it seems so short or looks so futile or feels so hard; just that there's something so abysmally wrong about it that nothing but a gospel with Almighty God in the middle of it, and a Man on a cross, could ever really be appropriate to our condition or relevant to our need.

MONDAY

It has to be borne in mind that the gospel does not traffic in advice. Nor did Jesus. Nowhere is it recorded that he spent much time saying "Please." Or "It would be very good for you indeed if you would." The wind never tips its hat. It sends you scurrying after your own. So does the New Testament.

TUESDAY

Never is Christianity lopsided and pathetic, with a long and sallow face, and pinched little morals: always it is the lack of it that is! Christ tied nobody's hands. He set men free to be the selves God meant.

Lent

PRAYER

Whenever we try to face life with nothing but the strength that is ours, show us, O God, how poor it is. Then share with us thine own, down the ways of thy steady purpose. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

ASH WEDNESDAY

You can't grow older before the face of this Christ without sinking, sinking, sinking in your own esteem. All your poor goodness has to crawl into his presence if it wants to get there, not like a whipped cur, or because he wants it so; but that's the way it feels, knowing its helplessness, never feigning, or whining, or fawning on majesty, or excusing itself—just seeing in Jesus' eyes the daily beauty that makes it ugly!

THURSDAY

"Think highly of yourself," says some peddler of slightly old and somewhat warmed-over chestnuts. He thinks you'll get well that way; and being what you are you get sicker trying. An inferiority complex doesn't come of not thinking as highly of yourself as you *ought* to think. An inferiority complex is the seatbelt we use when we have to fly lower than the stratosphere where we rightly belong.

FRIDAY

What we think is ugly about sin is only the mask it puts on! If the mask were ripped off, we could see what God thinks is ugly.

SATURDAY

The gospel tells us what we do not know about the source of all bitterness, about the real threat to our existence, come sunshine or cloud. It talks about the serpent at the heart of every paradise we stake out for ourselves, turn-

ing it into a fool's paradise. And the name of that serpent is *I*, alias *my* and *mine*—a self so busy with its claims to priority, its own ceaseless demands on life, that it has little time to do anything more than to look around in the rush, and shake its head about *you* and *your*, about *him* and *her* and *it*—as if something were unaccountably wrong with the whole structure of the universe.

First Sunday in Lent

PRAYER

Thou, O God, seest us, and knowest us altogether. Be present to us now of thy mercy, and grant us such grace of understanding as we of ourselves, being ignorant, do not know how to ask. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SUNDAY

When God took a handful of clay and hid in it the very torment of eternity, he got him a turmoil out of it. And why not? But the birds of heaven and the beasts of the field looked on with wondering eyes; for this strange creature had its heart among the stars, and its head was only a little lower than the angels! There was a man.

MONDAY

You aren't likely to be sent out under the will of God to do startling, impossible things. You are likely to be sent out to do the quiet, unspectacular things that matter, precisely where you are and with what you have!

TUESDAY

Here is the eternal paradox of the Christian faith: it does our sufficient and lofty selves the indignity of sin; and it does these brief lives of ours on this distant planet all the honors of eternity.

EMBER WEDNESDAY

In our finiteness we both yearn toward the infinite and resent it. There are tides in our being, like the systole and diastole of God's own heartbeat; now broadly welcomed, away up some spreading estuary, lifting the world's traffic to the sea; thrown back now from every cliff and headland, as if for all our frailty we ourselves were saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but not further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

THURSDAY

It is never long before the life that has no meaning beyond its own narrow horizons begins to grow emptier and emptier. With no interest left but self-interest, there is soon no interest left. With Job it was disaster; with others routine, a listless boredom that plods down the hours watching the clock; with others still, just sin. They start out with a smacking of the lips; they wind up with nausea in a third-rate hell, where everybody seems to be elaborately and intolerably dull.

EMBER FRIDAY

Not God is *love*, but *God* is love. When you say it that way you are saying the costliest thing that could be said of God, and it's the costliest thing that can possibly be said about us. If it ever lays hold on you, I don't know what the upshot will be, and you don't either. What really matters is, Have you ever got up close enough in the crowd around Jesus to "buy" it, as we say, at any price? The wholeness of God's love, austere and shieldless, will move in whenever you let it to make whole these broken lives of ours. That's the only safety there is. God is almost intolerably careless about crosses and swords, arenas and scaffolds, about all the "evils" and all the "plagues." His caring doesn't mean that he goes in for upholstering! There is no other love that knows how to do what it has to do. His love knows how to shape a human life.

EMBER SATURDAY

Jesus sees men as they are and sees that they matter. He is never ready to accept their estimate of themselves. He

will not weigh their several skills in a balance, throw in a few native talents here, add a social background there, and multiply everything, or else divide it, by the position they occupy in the city. He simply assumes, against "distress of nations in perplexity," with "the roaring of the sea and the waves," that they count.

Second Sunday in Lent

PRAYER

God of our life and hope, trouble us with such visions of thee, and such knowledge of thy will, that our hearts, touched into love again, and quietness, may be ordered and disposed to thy service. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The proper study of mankind is not man, as Alexander Pope said it was: it's God. As a matter of historical fact, we are lost today precisely because we have spent so much time studying ourselves. I know and you know that that can ruin anybody. Galileo found out that this earth is not a planet swimming along in space; it is itself in heaven, with all the rest of that mighty panorama of stars. We have got to make that discovery about ourselves: that there is above us and around us—God!

MONDAY

In the Old Testament they used to say that God was a disturbing Person to meet, were quite certain it would be dreadful, would mean death! Where did we ever get the idea that being with him a little while before going to bed would top things off nicely?

TUESDAY

The story of Jacob is the epic of all this shadowed human life of ours, where we have to deal over and over again with the presence of God, with his steady scrutiny, and at the last and at the worst, with his ruthless love that will not let us go on as we are, that will hurt us before it will let us go on. There is something terrifying about the experience when it's real, when at the last things have gone on long enough, and God has to take a hand himself; when the wrestling is no longer with an uneasy conscience, but with the very God who has made the conscience uneasy.

WEDNESDAY

The disconcerting thing about God is that in this drama of human life he is billed as a friend, and for the first two chapters of Genesis he acts like it—two whole chapters! Then in the third, because we are what we are, he begins to behave for all the world as if he were a foe.

THURSDAY

There is a threat in the Christian gospel. It's the threat of a God who is just. You can't offer excuses to him or to life. But I don't want to operate under that threat. There is a promise in the Christian gospel. It's the promise of a God whose mercy always does somehow outrun his justice. But I don't want to operate under the promise. I want to be in this thing because loving him just a little for his love, I'd like to be as he is.

FRIDAY

Isaiah keeps talking of the God who hides his face; and Paul keeps talking of his wrath. How can any of us be so busy being righteous as not to hear either of them? I once saw a cartoon in the *The New Yorker* of a man who had just passed a sign reading "Prepare to meet thy God." He was stopping now in front of a mirror to take off his hat and smooth his hair! Tongue in cheek perhaps—it was yet an etching with acid, a sardonic comment on the shallow, cosmetic make-do that likes to strut around in heaven's face, hoping to collect a scrap of credit! Hair lotions indeed! And comfort! Who said comfort? It's a soft word that gets harsh treatment in the gospels. We want to be told that God is always near. It wouldn't occur to him

to go away! But what if the God we have is farthest off when the God we want seems nearest, and nearest when the God we want is farthest off! Is that what Luther meant when he said in his violent fashion, "Nobody in this life is nearer God than those who hate and blaspheme him. He has no more dear children than they." At least they know the God they have is not just the God they want!

SATURDAY

"The fear of the Lord" is that dread which steals into the human soul with the realization of God's awful holiness, and is the mainspring of "faith and piety." It is a fear that troubles man's conscience and humbles his pride; for before God no mortal can stand, nor any angel. It is a fear that commands his allegiance and brings the whole of his life into the unity of a willing and reverent obedience. It is not the fear that love casts out (I John 4:18). Rather is it the fear that casts out all other fears (Matthew 10:28), and by the coming of Christ, in his life, his death, his resurrection, is "made perfect in love."

Third Sunday in Lent

PRAYER

Hear us, O God, in all our deep desires: some we can put into words, most of them we can't, because we are strangers even to ourselves. Of thy mercy answer us, after thy will and wisdom, not after ours. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

There are so many worn-out, impoverished, uneasy lives—people who somehow seem to grow more destitute with the years. Each day subtracts something, takes something out of them, and never seems to offer anything that can quite make up the loss. Until after a while, they will tell you so themselves, they feel much as a sucked orange must feel when it gets a chance to meditate by the side of the road!

MONDAY

We can hardly tell any more which way to travel: back from the complexities of civilization, with its machines and tyranny, to the sweet simplicities of nature; or on from nature and the beast toward the fair light of reason, the drone of planes, and the screech of bombs! Both are marked EXIT, but there is no exit! It is the precise tragedy of our time that we keep piling up in front of them.

TUESDAY

When Jesus said to his little band of disciples, "Without me ye can do nothing," he wasn't talking to hear himself talk. He wasn't embroidering anything, or crocheting a fringe around it; he was turning out a usable piece of homespun. That's how it is, whether it has our vote or not. He knew what we're facing.

WEDNESDAY

Jesus won't turn the world into a playhouse for you, where all you have to do is to say, "I'm sorry," and every-

thing straightway will be all right. Rather will he bring you face to face with a God who does rescue people: but in that very moment starts a "serious conversation" with them about themselves, and what life is worth as they've been living it, and if they're planning to go on living it that way forever. The woman at the well tried to wriggle out of it by changing the subject and talking about theology. The intelligentsia on Mars' Hill wagged their finger at Paul and said, Ah, no! no! We'll listen to you some other time! But it won't do. For all the Sunday School picnic some of us want to make out of Christianity, there comes a day when we have to meet the God who inhabits our loneliness.

THURSDAY

I know the things that happen: the loss and the loneliness and the pain. But there's a mark on it now: as if Someone who knew that way himself, because he had traveled it, had gone on before and left his sign; and all of it begins to make a little sense at last—gathered up, laughter and tears, into the life of God, with his arms around it!

FRIDAY

There's a God here who has done a costly deed: bearing on two rough beams of wood what only he can bear; carrying here in these days of Pontius Pilate, and through all of human history, what we can't; sharing with us the worst, and still showing us the best; saying with every tired muscle of his hurt body that we can have it whenever we like, as much of it as we will. And no one who has ever been within sight of that place can rest any more!

SATURDAY

This thing in front of you, this fear, this lot of yours, this failure, this discouragement, this future, whatever it is that keeps staring you out of countenance—face it with him, and it won't even use you up: there will be grace enough left to share, if you'll only garner it somehow and put it to work! The people I know who have met life's hazards with Christ never do seem burned out and exhausted: they had courage enough once; now they have courage enough, and faith enough, to give away.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

PRAYER

Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, grant us such strength as may support us, and ask of us such strength as thou wilt thyself supply. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Much has been said to comfort humanity. A good many things have been spun out to inspire it. But there has never been a deed like that deed of God's uttermost care for men, the Love that with wounded feet comes along the rough places with us as though it had now been long familiar with them. And its whispering is like the whisper of one who on a day bowed his head and went home, holding a thief by the hand.

MONDAY

There is a passion for torn and bleeding life which has to root itself at the foot of a cross if it roots itself anywhere.

TUESDAY

If you will turn to the tenth chapter of John, where Jesus is talking of himself as the Good Shepherd, you will see how casually he introduces the wolf, as if it were an integral part of the scenery. He seems to imply that anybody who wants to deal with the world realistically must begin by assuming the wolf. The wolf belongs to the landscape as much as the sheep do. There's no "when" about it, and no "if"; only this: "He that is an hireling seeth the wolf coming." Life apparently, for some queer reason, was never intended to run smoothly. So many people give every indication of believing that it ought to flow along with a comparatively unruffled surface. When it doesn't, they say something must be wrong with it. I often think this would come a good deal nearer the truth: to guess that something is wrong with it when it does.

WEDNESDAY

Perhaps we need life's riddles if we are to hold on at all to any sense of God's greatness, and not just waste our time pottering about with a Deity who is indeed very like other men, the grocer at the corner, or the neighbor across the street, throwing open the windows of heaven in the morning, doing the day's chores, and pulling down the shades at night. Remember the black curtain that fell on "Nebo's lonely mountain" when Moses died there, looking out over a land of promise he would never enter. In some far-off way it was like the curtain that fell on Calvary, with something of the same sublime pathos, the sadness of inexplicable defeat. Yet strangely enough it serves only to make us conscious of how awful a thing the soul of man is. Life is not futile, life is nobler for it: less trivial because of the victory that was not won and the trumpets that were not blown.

THURSDAY

You can come upon no more optimistic a doctrine of man anywhere than that he is a "fallen" creature, not at all now what he was intended to be. Nowhere else can you find such a realistic appraisal of the human situation on the one hand, and such a boundless belief on the other in man's possibilities under God. Victory is certain! God's kind.

FRIDAY

Not so much out of the confused bustle of lives like our own, rather from the quietness of those courts of heaven, does revelation come; showing us ourselves as we are, and

laying a live coal from the altar of God on your lips or mine; until our sin is purged, and a Voice speaks with some human tongue! No message of good cheer, in spite of everything; no making of people snug and warm against the howling of the storm without: but with the stern and balanced Word of One who will not be foiled in his hatred of sin, but marches through terror and blood straight in its face.

SATURDAY

The comfort of the Scriptures never was intended to soothe you or make you feel all right, never mind how nasty you've been, or how terrible things are: it was intended to send you back into the fight, whatever yours happens to be, with all the reinforcements God Almighty himself can throw in.

*Fifth
Sunday
in
Lent*

PRAYER

Honor us, O God, with the true hospitality of thy house, and give us of thy cup to drink: as much as with thee we can lift and hold to our lips. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Paul had unfurled his flag at the very start in his letter to the Corinthians: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." It wasn't their faithfulness he was counting on: it was God's.

MONDAY

The cross is any place where a saving love goes out to undergird this life of ours, and comes back with the hot stab of nails in its hands.

TUESDAY

Jesus was never pushed about and pressed into a corner and nailed fast. Nobody in Jerusalem that day was as quiet and uncompelled as he. Pilate went in and out wringing his hands: but never once was Christ twining and un-twining his fingers as if he didn't know what to do. So it's we who are helpless now, not God. He has in his grip—we don't—these days and these years, and what we've done to one another and to him.

WEDNESDAY

"There is another king, one Jesus." A grim sort of failure he was on the cross; but from that day to this it has been better to fail with him than to succeed with the people whose business it is in every generation to nail him there!

THURSDAY

What does God see in every one of us? He sees in us a life of his own devising able to resist not his might—that never really comes under consideration—but his love.

FRIDAY

The whole secret of the Christian gospel lies in being rescued, just so that you can be appointed to that unremitting tension: holding taut as Jesus did between what is and what God wants, pulling them together; because you too have given heaven the use of you on this earth, and of as many of your muscles as haven't turned flabby.

SATURDAY

You don't get laziness and indifference out of knowing that God will carry through to the end what he starts; you get Second Isaiah out of it, the prophet of the exile; with his flag flying, nudging the poor Jews by the waters of Bablyon, Thy God reigneth! Then trekking back to Jerusalem with them, tears running down his face, because God wouldn't break his word!

Holy Week

PRAYER

For all that we know of thee, O God, we give thee thanks, and for all thou art which is beyond our knowing. Stretch forth the right hand of thy mighty power against everything that stands in the way of thy will: against us, if it must be, and redeem us out of our fears and failures into what thou wouldst have us be in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PALM SUNDAY

Two mighty, tragic characters enter on the wide stage of the world: man and God. Here they are, Act I, in the city streets at high noon, confronting one another. Quickly they shift about, from temple court to the little village of Bethany; until on Good Friday, with dry eyes and parched lips, one comes upon Act II, "Man's Way with God." After that the hours drag by from dusk to dawn to dusk again: when there, in the dim twilight of morning, the last Act opens, "God's Way with Man." We thrust him away and he comes back, like "the eager, terrible spring." And it goes on and on. Always, late or soon, man, with the gods he makes—Baal for his crops, Venus for his lust, Mars for his anger—meets the God who makes him! Never until then does he know himself for what he is: harried and hectored by grandeur and meanness; always halfway between heaven and hell, between the abyss of his own sin and the boldest, hungriest hopes that ever strode up and down through the human soul. Nor until then does he know what God is. This turbulent, ugly thing called humanity, princely and full of heartache, Jesus loved—and left on it forever the mark of his hand, and the seal of his unbroken dominion.

HOLY MONDAY

There is no ultimate design anywhere except a cross. You might think God had woven it into the pattern from the first. Whatever he intended when he set out, whatever he planned to make of us, he was determined never to ask anybody to do what he wouldn't: to be more alone or more helpless in the face of defeat and death. At least he shouldered the consequences when his dream went wrong, every one of them, no anodyne, tasting it all, holding out his

steady promise down to the last dregs of the bitter cup which the world still presses to his lips.

HOLY TUESDAY

Calvary was God's mark, his seal and signature, on the bill of rights which he drew up at Creation. And more: it was the vindication at cost of that holiness in him which is the only hope humanity has, and of that power which alone can give his love "eternal and righteous effect."

HOLY WEDNESDAY

But mind you, God's offer of himself is a dangerous offer! The culture of which we are a part wants us to think of him as if he were our great Ally. We sing "God bless America," and it never seems to occur to us that he may find it very difficult. What is worse, it never seems to occur to us that if he succeeds we may not like it! Everything will not be all right when you meet him. If anything like a meeting ever takes place between you, you are likely to catch there the first real glimpse you've ever had of how much is all wrong!

MAUNDY THURSDAY

"That we through . . . comfort of the Scriptures. . . ." It has nothing to do with being coddled, in the nook and chimney-side of God's tenderness. It has to do, may I say, with being in a garden at night, as Jesus was, when the torches began to flicker through the trees, the angry glint of them falling on swords and staves: and all at once to feel a

hand on your shoulder. But the hand is God's because you signaled to him, and he's there. "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"—then that towering presence in the dark.

GOOD FRIDAY

I'm kin to these Jews, and they frighten me. Talk about their being Christ-killers is all rot. You can't get rid of the guilt that easily. It's the human heart that drives nails into the hands and feet of God: your heart and mine. It's eternity that is placarded on that cross; while time seems just to march on in front of it!—each generation giving a blow.

HOLY SATURDAY

The buried Christ will not stay dead. The phoenix, with a great beating of wings, soars upward from its own ashes at the heart of the flame. No sooner is the obituary read, and all the creed quite done for, than the birth notice tumbles out on the desk and clamors for print. The Bible sits up in its coffin and grins at Voltaire. "The word of the Lord endureth forever."

Easter

PRAYER

Keep our faces, O God, toward the coming of thy kingdom; and grant us, against every repeated assault, to choose thy way, and not our own, that we may rest in the certainty of thy triumph. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

On Calvary men had their fling at saying "No" to God. But "very early in the morning the first day of the week," it was God's turn. He said his "No" to the judgment hall where Pilate had condemned Jesus, to the hill where the soldiers had crucified him, to the grave where Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had helped to lay him, to the seal that had shut him in, and to the guard that had stood watch. How much is there in us to which he must say it still!

EASTER MONDAY

The resurrection of Jesus Christ tells all who will listen that they are alive in a place which is itself alive, open at both ends, with the winds of eternity blowing through it. It shows them that "the whole wide world" is precisely where the old Negro spiritual locates it, in the hands of God; that nobody in it can be hounded and victimized, forced by circumstances into a kind of strait jacket that's enough to choke the breath out of him. "O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . Thanks be to God!" We live in a world where in fairness to ourselves we have to raise the question now about God's knowledge of his universe, and his "infinite resourcefulness" instead of just trying to capitalize on our own.

EASTER TUESDAY

What is Easter for? To comfort us all, and make of that "last enemy" a friend? It is the life-denying religions that think of death as a friend. Christianity is a life-affirming faith, as Judaism was before it, and knows death to be its

enemy. Every effort to represent it in any other role is not only sub-Christian, it is anti-Christian: covering it over with flowers to make it look pretty—partly in tenderness, and partly to get away from it. It is not the function of Easter to underscore our “intimations of immortality,” or to marshal all the facts in support of them. In the Biblical faith, when we are dead, we are dead all over! It is God who raises us into life again, by his own mighty act, even as he raised Jesus from the dead.

WEDNESDAY

There is more than purpose in God's dealing; there is the purpose of One who is always himself: not full of whims and dispositions, not angry and tender by fits and starts, always what we have now seen him to be in Christ.

THURSDAY

I have never been able to worry overmuch about a man's fear of being too small. What worries me is our fear of being too great. Is it greatness that we want, and all that goes with it? The second mile, and maybe the third! The seventy times seven! The Easter gospel is a costly gospel because it refuses to let us flee from that, and under the vast colossus of our time be satisfied to find for ourselves the peace of some little grave! The resurrection gives to life dimensions which we have either to accept or to reject: and there will be a kind of suicide either way. Which kind will you choose? “He that would save his life, shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

FRIDAY

That deep and dark dominion—we don't know how deep and how dark—which is able to cancel right now, while they are still in the cradle, your dreams and mine about tomorrow. There are the odds! And the plans we have and the hopes we cherish are up against them, and nobody breaks through them easily, not even God. "That's just what makes me wretched," groans Dmitri, in *The Brothers Karamazov*. "All my life I have yearned to be honorable; and all my life I have been doing filthy things." If the odds against which Jesus set himself didn't amount to anything much, I don't see why we go on talking about him! "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace. . . . But when a stronger than he shall come upon him . . . !"

SATURDAY

I only know that eternal judgment stands there on that hill, hand in hand with an utterly reckless love. Death and triumph! And I go out from it dumb and forgiven and unafraid. Sure that this whole blundering world with all the ages on it is secure in one little corner even of this sheer amazement, this terror and this pity, which are "the severity and the goodness" of God. And sure too that we shall never be able to colonize more than the barest edge and shore line of that vast continent!

*First
Sunday
After
Easter*

PRAYER

Deliver us, O God, from our little fears, and
spoil for us whatever confidence we have left in
anything but thy victory. Amen.

SUNDAY

"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." Was it anything he saw that convinced Thomas, anything he touched? Or just something that got home to him, something so like the Jesus he had known that he couldn't hold out any longer, or keep the others from hearing what was in his heart and didn't have to be heard. "My Lord!"

MONDAY

Men may cry "Barabbas" all they like; but theirs is never the last word! God in the end says "Christ," and says it unmistakably. He's saying it still. They went around once before, looking for thorns and reeds and purple robes and worse; but they didn't finish the story! There was One who finished it! Nobody can ever hurl up into God's face such a ghastly contradiction as that cross, and then go about his business as if he had won.

TUESDAY

Jesus got out of it first one and then another who had seen God's face in his, with the lined and ageless compassion on it, and the peace in those eyes that looked so far ahead with such assurance! People who began to guess, as they found themselves still confronted by this Christ, that the end had been God's from the very beginning; that all along he had been weaving a pattern with his fingers that they had never more than faintly glimpsed; as a man might stare at the knots on the underside of some huge

tapestry, and only catch a hint here and there of the grandeur and the color of the master's design.

WEDNESDAY

Christ means that the pivotal fact of being is not our sin but God's deliverance. He means that cosmically, or he means nothing: not this present and tangled wrong, but that ultimate and sovereign Right, underneath and through and back of all created things, deeper than man's inhumanity to man, deeper than pain and death.

THURSDAY

Not one jot or tittle of this stupendous fact of the resurrection would Paul surrender to those who wanted to substitute for it the pagan doctrine of immortality. Death was not a door at the end of the corridor swinging open gently into eternity. There is the story of a little girl who every day as she left school, even on dark winter evenings, walked through a cemetery. When she was asked if she wasn't afraid, she answered brightly, "Oh no! This is the shortest way home." The apostle will have none of it. Death was no friend! Let the Stoic comfort himself with that illusion if he wanted to. And the Gnostic. Theirs was a life-denying faith. The Hebrew affirmed life as God's precious gift. So did the Christian. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed," says Paul, "is death." And it would be destroyed by the same mighty act which "raised up Christ" from the dead. There was no created inevitability working from within, no deathless substance, no soul breaking through the body's shell. It was God that raised Jesus—as it was God who in him had reconciled the world unto himself.

FRIDAY

There is one who came over on our side of the gulf, and picked up somehow worse scars than mine. Our tragedies are light against the darkness of his cross. I think he has a right now to take all weary folk in his arms, and say to them great, tender, knowing words, and not let them go. Calvary is the last comfort God has to give when life throws all its weight against a man!

SATURDAY

In the last book of the Bible ride the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: War, and Famine, and Death, and one other. And his eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew but himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

Second Sunday After Easter

PRAYER

Almighty God, who art away, but not far; and silent except for the sound of footsteps on the path beyond, and this ceaseless knocking at the door of our hearts: do thou reveal thyself to us, to each in the way thou seest fit; that for all our darkness it may be light again, out of our troubles granting us that peace which maketh all things peaceful. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Trace the word "hope" through Scripture. See it blossom in the Psalms, when there were no signs of it in the times. The noun does not appear in the Gospels. What need is there, with Christ in every passing moment of the day?

MONDAY

A world without questions, with the mystery all gone, would be a world without God. And without anybody in it who knows that he doesn't fit, fashioned as he is in God's image. That beating on the pillow at night, the where and the what—"Oh that I knew where I might find him!" "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"—the how and the why—"How long shall I cry, O God?" "Why art thou so far from helping me?"—joy and pain and human destiny: what if every bit of it forces itself to the surface out of a sonship which we can betray and deny but cannot break, with Christ there trying to restore it? Our answers to the questions men ask never serve us, because under them God asks his, and he has so many more!

TUESDAY

It is extraordinary how futile exhortation is, and promise as well. When there is question of redemption, fact is what redeems, not advice; deed, not declamation.

WEDNESDAY

We find ourselves listening still to a man crowded with his disciples into a narrow room on a dead-end street,

saying quietly in the face of measureless defeat, while the ghost of that fear which had stalked them there began its chattering at the door, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

THURSDAY

"In all things—God!" In the memories that are too old, but still come stealing up out of the past—you once thought you could make new ones for yourself; in the dreams you've had that never will come true now; in the illness that fastens its iron grip on somebody that's dear to you; even in the sin that doesn't know when it's beaten and keeps crawling back where it was before: do you suppose that can defeat him, unless you want it to? "In all things—God!"

FRIDAY

We have seen him dressed in the ecclesiastical pomp of two thousand years, with all the borrowed embroidery of theological systems, the trailing garments of great creeds and liturgies—until no more anywhere does this homeless Wanderer among the poor seem to walk the crowded streets and dusty lanes of human life. The common corners where he used to stand are empty; the humble homes where he sat of an evening have no light in them, no sound of quiet words. I wonder sometimes if Mary, stumbling away from an open grave, up our dim aisles under stained-glass windows toward a marble altar, wouldn't stop short and look around bewildered, faltering out as she did so long ago, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him!"

SATURDAY

When that night under the roof, behind the locked door, Jesus stood looking at his disciples, as one might look out on the sea—how can you understand what it did to their world? You have grown used to it! Their fear didn't matter any more, or their running away, or the poor showing they had made. By this one undefeated life, they were as great now as ever they could bear to be; aye, greater than they would have liked if they had known. Never again would they have to settle for the grim facts. Neither do we, not in world where Christmas comes out of a stable, the Son of God out of a smelly little village, and twenty centuries of Christianity out of a tomb!

Third Sunday After Easter

PRAYER

Thou hast brought us to this place, O God, by all our several ways, ever keeping faith with us, for all our unfaithfulness. Go before us still, we beseech thee, by thy Word and Spirit, leading us from this day forth where it shall please thee. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Where Christ is, there is the End and the Beginning; and Christ is here! In him we have already come to the Judgment which casts its shadow before, and found it to be a mercy that lays its demands on us, invades our life, casts God's fire on the earth, only to unshackle in the midst of it his love!

MONDAY

A higher order of reality has smashed through, and I must stand up life to life; with a charge upon me that can rid me, as nothing else can, of too much *me*. There, and there alone, lies the secret of a new and greater freedom. We are free when we obey God; we are slaves when we quit. *Cui servire, regnare est.*

TUESDAY

We have God! We think he holds the stars in their place. That's what we say, there in the Creed. We say he came to us once, died for every lonely soul of us, and rose again! We've *got* to do something about it! We can't just sit here and make nothing of it!

WEDNESDAY

In the cross and resurrection, and there alone, Paul found the challenge of what these people in Corinth really were. And he set it up in defiance of all they seemed to be.

THURSDAY

Who are these that "love God"? They are the people for whom what we think is big has turned out to be uncomfort-

ably little, and what we think is little quite intolerably big. We want to be left alone with our loyalties, with our good hard sense, and the ways we understand. We'd rather hold fast our bargains, the stuff we've picked up from life's counters, there under the artificial lights where we've paid down the price of them! Why should we be so eager to find out how shoddy many of them are? If we should ever start living as big as this life out of death makes us, we should have to be brave enough to manage as sons of God, even in the rush hour, and when we aren't loved to go on loving without fear! Is it bigness that we want? Neither the Good Friday nor the Easter gospel will let us run away from it. We have to receive it or reject it. And there is a kind of suicide either way. Which kind do you prefer? God will not waste anything; but there are always those of us who waste God.

FRIDAY

It is a burden, living with a love like his in a world like ours, never think it anything less; but such a burden as sails are to a ship, or wings to a bird! With no fulfillment for anybody short of taking it on.

SATURDAY

As a man sits by the hearth in fellowship with his friend, never thinking to make life smoother by it, catching the inspiration of that other's presence, sharing the vision of those other eyes, and then goes out into the busy world with peace again: so may a man before the fire sit with God!

Fourth Sunday After Easter

PRAYER

Grant us, O God, to be mindful now of thy presence, that what we think and say, and all we do, may learn to arrange itself as before thy face. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

There used to be a gospel hymn when I was a boy that had a chorus which kept saying, "Hold the fort, for I am coming." I got so tired of holding that fort! I sang about it among very so-called low-church friends and looked around; but nobody came. The next Sunday I looked around among the high-church folk, thinking that God perhaps might prefer the somewhat more classical traditions of their church music; but nobody came. And for a very simple reason: God was there to begin with.

MONDAY

There can be no toning down, no softening of that "note of austerity" which is the very signature of all truth. Whatever is true is rigorous and demanding, because it is reliable and unalterable. It will not lend itself to compromise, or pass over lightly any inconsistency. It is not content with what appears to be the case, but is on the lookout for what is ultimately real, and therefore permanently valid. It probes beyond the symptoms to the disease. It is radical in the sense that it gets to "the bottom of things"; and in the Bible "the bottom of things" is whatever is conformable to the will and purposes of God. His will is not difficult, that a man by strenuous effort might do it: it is in its holiness impossible, beyond all effort. His purposes neither relent nor excuse: they require and exact. He never says "please." Life never says it. There is very little of the "ought" or the "should," or "it would be a good thing if you would"! There is only the indicative of what the world is as God made it, and the imperative that under penalty of death commands us away from what we have done with it to what he has done about it.

TUESDAY

This world, since Christ died in it and rose again, is a place where the tragedy and the triumph are so interwrought that they cannot be disentangled any more. The fire and the solace, the purge and the healing—they belong together only when you see in them the gospel of a crucified and risen Christ, all the goodness and all the severity of God, both the beauty and the terror of life, this madness down here caught up and held fast by that majesty yonder, and the splendor of his love.

WEDNESDAY

A religion about God is like a car without a clutch: all the right ideas, but nothing to throw them into gear and make them function. The religion we have is Christ, God himself incarnate in human life, flesh and blood and bone, now and forever: creating, redeeming, acting, moving—not out yonder, here. To be a Christian is to be on the road with him, expecting no celestial handout, only a deep, deep sharing of this glory and this power with One who is God in the teeth of it all.

THURSDAY

To trudge across the dusty flats, when vision has dimmed into sight, and the Kingdom of God is not to be taken any longer by storm, and there are only the night and the stars, the dawn, and the road again—with the spires yonder on the world's rim! Until fear shall say its prayers, find heart, and light its candle instead of cursing the dark!

FRIDAY

Riddles without an answer are in part the hope we have of being found of God. The dark must fall before the stars can show themselves, flaming this way and that, countless jewels set against the soft cushions of the night.

SATURDAY

You say now and then of your life, that you don't like the setup. What if the setup were a cross! What if it should be God's purpose to conform you and me to the image of his Son: and you know and I know where his Son died! What if he were coming to you here on Calvary out of eternity, through sin and defeat and suffering, all the very darkest things of life, to show you how deep they are, and how ready he is, and how unappalled!

Fifth Sunday After Easter

PRAYER

O God, thou that wilt not flatter us who love flattery, and dost offer us toil who love ease, open our eyes that we may see what thou wouldst have us see in all the world about us, and our ears that we may hear what word thou wouldst speak in him who is that Word, even Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The God who inhabits our loneliness never holds out both hands to us and says, "You do this and I will do that." The claim and the comfort are not even the two sides of the same gospel. They are so thoroughly wrapped into one bundle that the comfort itself is God's claim; and the claim is the only comfort there is.

ROGATION MONDAY

When Christ can no longer be avoided, when it is clear that he never will be cajoled, men seek to be rid of him. His claims, they say, are ridiculous; his demands are impossible; his purity is an offense. To officialdom, sometimes in the church, far too often in the state, he is a disturber of the peace; his intolerable freedom a burden too grievous for any man to bear, or any institution.

ROGATION TUESDAY

The evil in this human stuff of ours is like a mad dog; and God drew its teeth in his own flesh! He laid his scarred hand on my soul, that I might no longer be so terribly confused, wondering what is right and what is wrong; left the print of his own scarred feet before me, by land and sea.

ROGATION WEDNESDAY

He said to Simon, "Go and preach." "To the men who crucified thee, Lord?" "Yes." "To those who brought the crown of thorns?" "Yes. To them say that I still have my

crown, and to him who came with the reed say that I have a scepter too." "Preach, Lord, to the men who drove the nails?" "Yes. And to those who cursed me say that I have a song for them; and to the soldier who pierced my side say that there is a nearer way to my heart than that."

ASCENSION DAY

You see, it's all a question of living up to our own original grandeur, which is Christ himself! We have no other! Jesus of Nazareth is what we are essentially! He's the image of God in us that we've doctored up to suit ourselves, changed it, painted it over; turned our assets into liabilities, until we don't like our own looks, want to forget and go away, as the prodigal did, dismiss it all. Only this Jesus won't let us. He keeps coming to us, and every word he says condemns us; condemns the world we've built.

FRIDAY

There were those who killed a young carpenter once because they cared not at all for a God they were unable to handle. Pastel shades indeed! If he was soft, then so are the laws which hold this universe together.

SATURDAY

The issue depends not so much on "what somebody said in Galilee" as on what God did at Calvary.

Sunday After Ascension

PRAYER

To whatever thou hast called us, O God, and at whatever cost, let it be. Only do thou lead us, lest we stop anywhere when thou art saying "Come," and by the gift of thyself make us strong. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

I am going to begin where Paul begins, with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, grace means more than charm and winsomeness; it means the sum total of all the blessing which Jesus came to bring and to be. It means mercy and truth. It means the divine favor. It means the power of God—resting now by reason of a Galilean upon human life. And all this in order that every man might at last discover himself to be a creature of the most amazing capacities, intrinsically great, and potentially triumphant. This surely is what Christ has wrought on the stage of the world.

MONDAY

It is an alien land that we ourselves have made, for Christ to be still walking about in it with his broken heart! We rarely give him much credit for that. He is an exile too, along those desolate ways that he meant for a garden; and I do not see why we should squander our sympathy solely on one another! I should like a moment here in which to pity him—a lonely, defenseless Galilean pitted continuously against the boisterous years, carrying his cross, and trying to make his voice heard over the huge clamor we raise and the peevish chatter of our own souls!

TUESDAY

There was not much that was new in Christian teaching. Christ was new. He was the authentic majesty of God, authenticated by the very laying of it aside. Where else was God so vast?

WEDNESDAY

There is no law to obey. There is a Christ to follow!

THURSDAY

The miracles that Jesus wrought were never meant to hold the eye. Beyond all of them is the mystery of the Man himself—turning his face at last toward Jerusalem, to be mocked and spitted upon and scourged and put to death; because that was God's way of winning back a lost creation!

FRIDAY

God is not only beyond us, not only reticent where he needs to be, lest my faith turn into the pride of self-assurance; he also has a disconcerting habit of breaking out on human life through the very places and experiences which I was confident at the time were the most desolate of all: in Babylon, when Jerusalem was a smoldering heap of ruins and his forgotten people sat by the lonely rivers with their songs stuck in their throat. That's where he was, there more than anywhere. It's just history. And on a naked little hill where three crosses stood like gaunt specters bearing their poor human freight: and a man cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And it thundered, but not then: it thundered when he was dead! Yet—can you hear the deep heart of the Eternal beating anywhere else so clearly now, inside all created things?

SATURDAY

You think he was a dreamer, who died for his dream?
He was an unromantic Son of Fact if ever there was one!
With something in view that held him. Vast, so that you
and I have to stand on tiptoe even to see it: God's way
into God's kingdom. Dreamer nothing! You see, he got
there, with that tired sigh of his: "Father, into thy hands
I commend my spirit!"

Pentecost

PRAYER

Thou hast called us into thy presence, O God.
Be thou therefore light for our darkness, and
strength for every high purpose wherein we are
weak. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

WHITSUNDAY

The Church is the knowledge that wherever Christ is, in time or beyond it, there he precipitates the crisis. Wherever he is there is judgment, and there is demand, and there is this present being shaped by that future which is the end without end. It is the knowledge that we have already reached what has been described as our last frontier, and there have encountered not nothingness but God!

WHITMONDAY

Jesus once spoke, as men remembered it, of building his church on the marshland of a life which he called a rock. Peter it was, and a more unlikely bit of shifting sand you could hardly have found. Yet Jesus added, in his "humble, outrageous arrogance," that the gates of hell would never be able to prevail against it. Have you thought he meant that hell was making the assault? He didn't. It was his church pounding at the gates. Hell it was that couldn't hold out! Will he then, do you think, find altogether beyond him the odds which happen at the moment to be staring you and me out of countenance? "Now that"—can you hear him answer as he looks at your outstretched hands?—"that I cannot possibly manage." . . . Certainly there's no guarantee anywhere in the Gospels that the issue will be tailor-made, according to our specifications.

WHITTUESDAY

There are enough people who go about helping along the twilight, and doing it theologically. A sick world is not likely to improve if we all keep jerking up the shades in the morning and saying, "Well, I see it's worse today."

Perhaps a sign should be posted for a while on the poor patient's door: "No visitors." Neither is there anything to be had of grinning or of slapping every third person on the back. There is much in being the kind of soul who has deep and hidden resource. The apostles go marching through the Acts singing their songs and waving their hands to us. They had something to be gloomy about; but no man can lay his life alongside of Stephen's or Peter's or Paul's and not have his pulses quickened. There was a triumph on which they drew in the midst of disaster; not a chirp and twitter practiced for the occasion, but a note resonant, like the diapason of an organ, leaving all the life around it quivering and glad.

EMBER WEDNESDAY

When God quits having you on his hands and you start having him on yours, you will find out how difficult he is! Instead of letting you count your many blessings, he will begin asking you questions about what you are going to do with them! We cannot afford to get our sociology and our theology mixed up! The elect, as a friend of mine has said, are not the elite. They are the uneasy ones, with the broken crust!

THURSDAY

We are not the elect hand-picked for heaven. We are hand-picked for responsibility and peril.

EMBER FRIDAY

The Church got its start there, where the worst in man met the best in God and said "No" to it unmistakably;

only to have God "pound the table hard" with his "Yes," and set about building the future on it.

EMBER SATURDAY

I heard the sober comment made recently by a very intelligent person that there always seemed to be something wrong with very Christian people. They were odd somehow and said odd things, with cramped, little ways—as if they had been forced into a mold they didn't fit. They wore strange clothes and strange expressions. It wasn't fun meeting them. It was funny. Maybe. But that isn't what Christianity does to them: it's what they do to Christianity.

Trinity Sunday

PRAYER

Thou, O Lord, hast never sent us empty away, unless we insisted on it. Deliver us from all our willful strivings with thy spirit. Have thine own way with us in this mysterious place, that from being disturbed by thy severity we may find our rest in thy goodness. Grant that this day our lives may be ordered by some new obedience, and enriched with some new compassion: until we are ourselves for running water where men's souls are parched, and for the shadow of a great rock in a weary land where other feet too are hot and tired from the lone and level sands. Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY

Getting back from Christianity to Jesus of Nazareth would be getting back from the British Commonwealth to Magna Carta, from the United States of America to the thirteen colonies. It is conceivable that our interpretation is wrong: but the interpretation belongs now to the fact and must be reckoned with. The union is indissoluble.

MONDAY

The Corinthians had been redeemed in order to redeem! That was the mission of the Church. And there could be no question about it! By the very central act of their worship they were the sacrificial community, set here under the shadow of a cross to shape at cost what they could of human history: "as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death"—the verb "to shew" is the word Paul uses when he speaks of proclaiming the gospel. It is by the death of her life that the Church heralds that life out of death which is God's most ancient habit! That's what the Church is for, and in that she differs from all other communities, and transcends them all.

TUESDAY

The wretchedness of the Church consists not in its weakness, but in its refusal of strength; not in its finitude, but in the pride that sets itself in the way of the Infinite; not in the relativities of its temporal lot, but in its substitution of them for the absolute and the Eternal. What it has to fear is not so much infiltration from the world, but rather love of the world. This is secularism. It is not in danger of being colored by the life around it; it *is* that life caught up

into another dimension whenever it turns its face Godward. And there lies its greatness: not in anything that it accomplishes, but in the fact that it is itself both the organ and the object of God's redemption; its uniqueness determined by the character of its Founder, its holiness by the creative brooding of his Spirit, its apostolic mission by his continuous appointment.

WEDNESDAY

I remember worshiping in one of three churches that belonged to the very same denomination, and stood on three of the four corners where two streets intersected. For years these congregations had prayed, each on its corner, every Sunday. You could have heard them through the open windows. They had prayed for the scattered sheep of Christ: that every schism might be done away, that there might be one fold and one shepherd. They did well to pray. But year after year nothing happened. It wasn't what they were. They weren't bad. They had convictions. It was the use they made of what they were that wasn't convincing.

THURSDAY

Perhaps after all it is a simple fact that the changes which take place in history take place first in the Church. Could it be that this is where God always lands, intense and wearing his scars; that this is where the invasion begins, that unimaginable, uncreated, incredible thing from beyond nature? Where you and I meet each other again because we meet him, at the foot of the cross; looking up into the face of his eternal judgment on our sins, and that eternal mercy for our souls: sure that we are something, and never have to pretend any more; in the goodly com-

pany of these others who do not have to pretend either; listening intently to that prayer "Father, forgive them . . ." until our own lips try to stammer it, and we begin to rub our eyes a little dazed, in a world where we thought we were

Alone on a wide, wide sea.
So lonely 'twas that God himself
Scarce seemèd there to be.

But on it now a strange, long shadow rests, with outstretched arms: and we, being many, are brethren, one body in him.

FRIDAY

As the Corinthians gathered around the table of their Lord, they published anew to the world, precisely by what they did, what God had done to make true the deepest knowledge Paul had of them. In that divine faithfulness, and in that alone, could they know themselves, in the face of life's unceasing rebuttals, as the frontier, the very invasion point, of God's history of salvation. They were the community which God in Christ had already redeemed. It lives on because Christ lives on! It's his plan, and not ours. It isn't a footnote to human history: God has written it straight into the text!

SATURDAY

And there at last, with true bounty, he gave them his own cup to drink: "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you"—straightway yonder into the world's teeth to redeem it. It was the quiet opening of a door; but after—? Ah, then, the traveling of a road that never could grow smoother than God's!

First Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

We have come, O God, at thy bidding. Unless we are willing to be healed, thou canst not heal the world's hurt. Grant us now in the power of thy Spirit to hear the word which maketh whole the sick, and all things new that were old. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The charge is often laid at the door of the Christian faith that fundamentally it is a means of escape, both from the rigors of thought and from the harsh realities of existence. Let those comfort themselves with such excuses who can. Escape it is; but not out of life, into it: from meaninglessness into meaning, from futility into purpose, from bondage into freedom, from security beset with peril into peril hedged round about by God.

MONDAY

Sympathy is one of the things they come seeking of us. And we are living in a world where just now of all times we can least afford to be without it. Not the cheap kind, which is nothing but diluted sentiment: the kind that costs something, that makes its way deliberately into the center of another man's condition, and instead of lording it about there with criticism and advice bows its head. We can get along with considerably less rubber-gloved diagnosis and ten-foot charity and transatlantic indignation. Wrongs are not righted with distant chatter, or the tips of the fingers. No use opening the grill and looking sad when somebody lays down his burden on your step: the question then is, How much can you carry and how far can you go?

TUESDAY

The world perishes not of dark, but of cold. The soul in its deep distress seeks not light but warmth, not counsel but understanding.

WEDNESDAY

Those who contend that the true faith can never get into politics should remember that zeal for a false faith can! National aggrandizement, private expediency, tribal doctrines of blood and soil openly take the place of morals, until man begins to lose his mind in the suppression of thought and his soul in the body politic. He shuts his eyes to what he is and begins to regard primarily what he has. Things count, and life grows cheap, ending for him in emptiness and hysteria and ruthless bondage to his own sterile lusts: such folk as are pictured on the sinister walls of ancient Pompeii. Over in Rome, when you take off your hat and step into some clear, cool chapel of the early days of Christianity, you realize what freshness fell with the gospel on the jaded senses of antiquity.

THURSDAY

To be the conscience of the state, the leaven of human society. That is my patriotism.

FRIDAY

May it not be for God's sake that we render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and for Caesar's sake that we render to God the things that are God's? The Christian Church has more than a nuisance value to the state; but the Word it speaks is a troublesome word, making the world angry, causing it to strike back because it never understands, but bringing it to wonder about itself!

SATURDAY

Paul in his letters, while consistently intent on moralizing religion, never makes the mistake which since his day has shaken the world to its foundations: the failure to religionize what morals had been left over to it from "the age of faith."

Second Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Thou seest us, O God, that we have need. And thou art open to the multitude of our prayers. Of thy wisdom grant us such things as we should have; and with them of thy love grace to use in accordance with thy purpose what things thou dost grant. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

I have the greatest difficulty trying to understand why Christian people could ever have allowed Christianity to be called an opiate and with so much reason; how anybody could ever have taken such a throbbing, vital thing and used it as a salve for the wounds of living! The one thing it was never intended to be was a comfort—unless we had got hurt in the battle for God and for his kingdom! To think that we can run away from the struggle to some upholstered place, and there appropriate for ourselves the kindly and gracious promises of One whose face is tense and muscles taut, like a man's face and muscles on a cross, is not to think at all.

MONDAY

In the gospel life is seen not as a laboratory but as a battlefield; not so much as a race, but at greater length and apparently with far more enthusiasm as the shock of armed legions, a war in the members, a panorama of fronts, flanks, and reinforcements. For it men are to make themselves ready. There is armor, there is a helmet, there are a shield and a sword—with belt and breastplate and sandals. All in the knowledge of a security that runs deeper than life; because the enmities that take life away cannot touch it.

TUESDAY

“... It is enough for you to have my grace.” That word “enough” has always amused me a little. It sounds so much as if God were trying to be very modest about it all, promising a grace just level with a man's need. And here it is, some ten years later, in the letter to Timothy: “the grace

of our Lord has flooded my life." It was not "enough." It was not up to the brim at all. It was a torrent, as if some dam had broken!

WEDNESDAY

We have to accept the fact that rewards and penalties in this life are not apportioned according to desert. A good man on a cross? The Son of God there? It was blasphemy. It has been pointed out that a friendly and favoring universe would indeed abolish the problem, but somewhat after the manner in which death abolishes disease! Is it possible that God is still in his heaven in spite of the fact that all is not right in the world? Could it be that God is in his heaven to triumph over all that is not right in the world?

THURSDAY

One often wonders what would have happened to Paul, with his thorn in the flesh, if somebody from a pulpit had talked to him about relaxing, about getting free of his inferiority complex, about saying to himself after each meal, and three times on going to bed, "Every day in every way I'm getting better and better." Can there be any question that if some preacher had made an easy identification of that with the Christian faith the world would have lost its greatest apostle?

FRIDAY

No wonder the apostle writes these same Corinthians later on, in his own impassioned way, beseeching them not

to receive the grace of God in vain. You couldn't be satisfied to set that inconceivably great thing only meager tasks, or reap from it thin and scanty harvests. Not the grace of God! It was unthinkable! The depth of his wisdom and the length of his patience, the clarity of his justice and the fullness of his mercy, the gallantry of his love and the steadiness of his power, holding the sea like moisture in his hand. To harness the tides and turn a flutter mill! To garner the driving energies of creation in order to keep a civil tongue in your head! Heaven turned wrong side out to no point and to no effect! Its treasure poured on the sand for nothing!

SATURDAY

What shelter the gospel offers, it offers because shelter is necessary: from the sheer futility of a godlessness that would multiply everything by zero; from the grim emptiness of an existence that cannot take with ultimate seriousness the only real difference there is in the world, the difference between good and evil. We are not here to be wrapped up in the power and promises of God, as if they were cotton batting, until all our bones are jelly, and there is no flame in the soul!

Third Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Bestow upon us, O God, all that thou dost ask of us, that in asking life of thee we may be ready to share thy life, and the weight of it, which is thy love in Christ Jesus. Amen.

SUNDAY

Seeking first the Kingdom of God isn't the pious exercise of a man who is unusually religious and a little peculiar: it's the road anybody can take into the only ultimate fulfillment life has to offer.

MONDAY

God's kind of justice is not blindfolded. It sees with the longing, steady eyes of Jesus; and they mean to win, with God's unbroken promise in them: the God whose awful power had to be gentle, or it would never have been great; and had to be awful, or for all his gentleness he would never have been of any use. A pity like that on Calvary did not break into human life to wander about helpless and witless, wasting its breath, unable to do anything. It broke in to probe and cut away, and so set at naught every costly fear men have—all the galling slavery of little souls, the odds that pile up, the things people ought to do and cannot—to make nothing of it, cancel it, set God in its stead. The majesty which is back of God's compassion is what makes the compassion matter.

TUESDAY

Life is not organized around us and our privileges. Neither our assets nor our liabilities are a key to the mystery. Is that why there are so many days when a closed door seems to be the only accurate symbol of reality? Pound on it ever so hard, and whoever lives there, if anybody does, will not open it. Storms come and accidents happen. Disease stalks up and down, holding hands with death. Crops grow or rot with blight. Rain falls, or the

parched earth bakes hard and cracks open under the sun. "What's the good of being good in a world like that?" asked a woman. Rather, what would be the good of being good in any other kind of world?

WEDNESDAY

God is issuing his summons. Humanity does not have to look him up every once in a while. Whole generations are obsessed with techniques. How go about the business of praying? How cultivate the religious mood? How tap the reservoirs of infinite power? So was a book about the Sermon on the Mount advertised! It rarely occurs to such people that the most important step in the whole transaction has already been taken. The difficulty is not so much that they are unable to find God; the real difficulty is that they cannot manage to get rid of him.

THURSDAY

What if God doesn't seem to be around because underneath everything else in us there is something that doesn't want him to be, couldn't stand it if he were! The cost of that might well have been a crucifixion! It wouldn't be enough then to relax, and say we're sorry for something we remember, and for much that we've forgotten! We couldn't go on supposing we have God, in some doctrine or some church; know him, in some book or some experience. It may well be that the God we know, and the God we have, because he's the God we want, is not the God who *is*.

FRIDAY

What God is asking of us in this world he has not forgotten is the kind of gallantry that will stop hugging so close everything we have, and stand up as he did, and fling it to the winds if we must, on any cross life undertakes to knock together for us.

SATURDAY

One evening, in the middle of his sermon, an old evangelist, it is said, threw up his hands and shouted, "My friends, God hates religion!" The whole Bible, Old Testament and New, is the story of how much he hates what we make of it.

Fourth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Redeem us, O God, out of all our poor ways into thine. Teach us thy will for us by calling us back each day to the things which we know are most certainly true. Direct our lives by the constant pressure on them of other lives that have felt the touch of thy hand and loved the beauty of thy peace. Until our faces be set toward thee, and all our hopes hid forever in thine. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

We stand up in the world's face not because we are God-bewitched, as we ought to be; but because we are self-bewitched: obsessed with the powers of the human mind or with the might of our human hands.

MONDAY

Let's quit being absurd. No use asking science to deliver us from evil; for thine is the education and the legislation and the evolution, forever and ever. It won't get us out. The farther on we go, the vaster the wrong becomes. I can do more harm in my kind of world than Machiavelli could do in his. There is progress in righteousness; but there is progress in wickedness to keep step with it.

TUESDAY

I suppose nobody is quite so likely to turn complacent as those of us who call ourselves Christians, just because we've grown used to being what we are. We've listened to sermons preached about God, we've read a few books about him, we talk about him occasionally, and now and then recommend him very, very highly. We can even explain the mystery of his dealings, particularly when somebody else is hurt by them. We can give you definitions and answers to your questions, and tell you precisely what's wrong with you the minute you ask, and advise you as to just what you ought to do. All of which I say by way of gentle satire. And I'm rather well pleased with it. How well pleased are you with yourself because you suspected that I

was well pleased with myself? That's how subtle complacency really is.

WEDNESDAY

Life doesn't seem to have much stomach for examining itself steadily; so every now and then it puts on a devil-may-care mood and takes to a bit of revelry for an antidote. I have often thought what a soul-shattering thing it would be to lift the maudlin masks you'll find in any crowd and see people wearing their real faces!

THURSDAY

We can't get away from our own greatness, and let it go, content to be blown about by circumstance like thistle-down. There's a grandeur that was born in us, and it makes us uneasy. The Bible calls it "the image of God." The only trouble is, we don't like it as he made it.

FRIDAY

The cross is God's victory over sin, our sin: the old habits that keep clinging like barnacles to a ship's hull, blind, blazing prejudices, clammy indifference—all of it piling up into weird and monstrous things. Christ got into it where it was heaviest and darkest, not to wipe it out and make it as if it were not, but to do with it what only God could do: not to change the past, to change the future; to set our souls cleansed and steadied against the rush of all the evil that continually wells up from within, and from without swings like a tide across the dreary flats of human life.

SATURDAY

Nor does the mind of God for men and nations seem foolish and irrelevant any more, for all the angry way we try to toss it off, crying out that it mocks us with its unattainable beauty. With the face of Jesus there, that mind seems like the "established custom of Eternity," the only mind there is, majestic and serene, bent as soberly today as ever it was on getting itself done!

"Remember, I am God. There is none else. Declaring the end from the beginning. My counsel shall stand." When God said that from a cross he said something that would hold. It held through that unutterable darkness on Calvary. I think it will not be shaken now!

Fifth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

It isn't our knowledge, O God; it's the weariness of it that we would have thee see and pity. It isn't our skill, but the abuse of it—not our energy, but the languor of our souls. God pity that, and redeem us, making us strong in thy grace for every day's fresh adventure toward thy purpose. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

The ageless symbol of the Christian faith is a cross with a man on it, arms outstretched under a mute sky, nails in his hands; and in his heart something he has never thought to earn: the mystery of God's eternal peace. The very hardness of that is flung down like a glove in front of all the gallantry there is in the human soul. Jesus rests his whole, whole case on it.

MONDAY

There is something you will never be without this Christ. Watch some gaunt and naked bush in the park. Under warm skies it seems suddenly to come alive. Little by little it begins to swell with the mysterious tides of the spring. Stem and twig and tendril, it pushes out one tiny bud after another. And it will keep on crowding them with life until they break open into a thousand delicate blossoms—a very burst of flame there by the side of the road. Call it fulfillment if you like. It is the filling full of all there is inside that is worth fulfilling, until that “intolerable compliment” which God has paid us all begins to find its way out through us into human life.

TUESDAY

Almost everybody is hounded and badgered about by the specter of a grander self than any he's ever known or laid his hands on. No use calling him a hypocrite. He may be a failure, but he isn't necessarily a fraud. When you see him going to church it isn't always a mask he's wearing; it may be a battle he's fighting.

WEDNESDAY

God isn't likely to be offended by any man's asking for what he wants and needs, as simply as a child would ask. He invites it! "Whatsoever" is the word Jesus has for it—but with this flag at the masthead, "in my name"! When you hoist that, you're headed for the open sea! This place where you kneel and bow your head is only a port of call: beyond the asking there is more!

THURSDAY

Duration is nothing much to be excited about, or to boast of; particularly if it means that we are going on forever as we are. Such a prospect might conceivably be quite dreadful. But if living is other even now than we have thought it—not mean, or shallow, with all the world laughing last and much the best—but great and lofty and deep; then let life let go, for Life is born!

FRIDAY

Look to the man they nailed to a cross once, whom force couldn't touch. And lies fell down around him helpless. And injustice couldn't do anything but scourge him and leave its scars on his hands and feet. Until everything that tried to crowd in against him "broke itself on the fact of God!" And he came back to haunt this life of ours forever; because the worst we can do can't get rid of him!

SATURDAY

There is something grand about living, and majestic: the sweat and the blood and the tears, the joy and the

tragedy. It all seems to be headed somewhere, to be bent on some huge eternal gain for the universe. Either that or nothing; and nothing doesn't think! It doesn't think any more than a row of zeros would think, marching along page after page. You come upon them somewhere in the middle, and look back and back and back to see what sense they make; but they begin with zero! That way madness lies! We know very well what it is that's on foot, when we are in our right mind: this incredible parade with God in front of it! It isn't something to make a man sick and tired. It's a thrilling thing when you see it whole and see yourself as part of it, moving across this stupendous stage of history against the backdrop of eternity. The challenge of it is like the challenge of bugles. It's like the restless rattle of drums in the dark!

*Sixth
Sunday
After
Trinity*

PRAYER

Keep us, O God, from presuming lightly to preach or lightly to hear thy word, so upholding us, and so opposing us, that in all our weakness thy strength may be made perfect. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The tension of all human history and of all human life is strung taut like a wire between God's weakness and our might.

MONDAY

At the last, in its inmost heart, the world seeks not reformation or revolution, but renewal; not forgetfulness, but forgiveness; not prosperity, but peace; not security, but strength.

TUESDAY

We are God's shock troops! Never to count on him at all unless our counting on him spells for us a commitment, high and glad and unreckoning, beyond expediency and prudence and common sense; a commitment that will leave its arithmetic at home, set out for those horizons which are as far as it can see, and when it cannot see, is willing to go it blind! Christianity never raises as a primary question the defending of this faith or the saving of that institution. It always raises a prior question: Are we caught and held by whatever it is up yonder to which we are bound not just by duty, but by the freest choices and the deepest loyalties of our being; not by what we can command, but by what commands us; not by what we can carry through this tragedy of a broken world, but by what can set us about with power to bind up its wounds and bring back into its eyes as we can that light of the knowledge of the glory of God which is in the face of Jesus Christ?

WEDNESDAY

"My grace is enough for you." I suppose there are people who read those words and are far more sure than they ought to be that Paul really heard them! We could manage too, on such terms. He prayed once, and what he wanted didn't happen; so he prayed again, and it didn't happen then either. We'll go along with that. That's exactly how it is. But the third time he got an answer, and we haven't had any. I can't help wondering about that. It's the silence, the terrible silence, that says "No" to us. I wonder if it wasn't the silence, the terrible silence, that said "No" to him—"No, but. . . ?" He carried that burden all his life, you know. Some blemish, was it, that would make a Jew ashamed? The pride and the passion maybe that kept nagging at him all his days. Perhaps the secret of it lies hidden away somewhere in the agony of that seventh chapter of Romans: "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Then the doxology for a victory that hadn't been won yet: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." When you don't hear anything, isn't there something you *ought* to hear? "My grace is enough for you."

THURSDAY

Scripture wastes very little time on the way we feel. It sets something in front of you, not inside, outside, that you can lay your hands on; and it is not just the fact of forgiveness, though you can document from many a modern drama and novel what goes on where there is none. It's not even the fact that some good at last can get in where the evil used to be. Rather it's this, for anybody who will take hold of it: the fact that life can come now

where death was! The Bible isn't interested in anything else.

FRIDAY

The man on Calvary was not bowing his head to a tempest he couldn't stand up against, resigned to some bleak, inscrutable Providence that had overtaken him: it was he that had struck those dreadful blows with the hammer, nailing down the very evil that had thought to do away with him and now could never again hold any man fast: showing it up, taking its scepter from it, changing the face of the earth. It wasn't a dismal rout; it was an incredible conquest.

SATURDAY

In the Bible you do not look around to see what you can make of life, and then look up. When Moses "looked around" he killed a man! You look up; then you look around!

Seventh Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

We would offer thee this day, O God, with sobered minds, what we are: that to the enrichment of our life, and of all life, thou mayest make of it what thou wilt. Grant us to be weary at last of our own too safe and cautious lives and from thy certain Presence here to bring back into this defeated world some liberating sense of that inheritance which always has been ours, except for our poor dealing with it. So fulfill in us what thou didst intend when thy hands shaped us, and of thy grace fit us to thy service. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

SUNDAY

The only dignity that belongs to us comes not of us, but of the simple fact that we are unintelligible without God.

MONDAY

If we understood God we should do well to doubt him. His inscrutable providences, embracing both the good that he wills and the evil that runs contrary to it but cannot defeat it, will not lay themselves open to our inquiry. The nearest we can come is the knowledge we may have in Christ of his unfailing gracious intent, with the readiness and power which only his grace can fashion to clothe that intent with our own flesh and blood. The only profound and truly relevant question is not a question at all, but an answer: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

TUESDAY

You can live without a design for living; but you can't have a life without it! The trouble is, from a merely experimental point of view, that God has to be written into it somewhere, or it never will prove adequate.

WEDNESDAY

If I'm not such a good preacher, lawyer, doctor, why don't I take that for the fact—instead of posing, and going about touchy and sensitive? If you aren't such a howling success either, nowhere near the genius you thought you were, why don't you? Instead of putting on such a wretched front, and spending the rest of your days being miserable? Why don't we accept what we are, and hand it over to

Christ, and say, "Here, you take it and make something of it; I can't." Hand it all over!

THURSDAY

Peace in the New Testament is relevant primarily not to secular but to religious anxiety. If there is no trace of that to begin with, down where the ultimate questions are asked and the ultimate answers are given, then the only thing possible for anybody is the counterfeit of peace, which is sentimentality, a kind of "premature sanctification," as someone has called it, the illusion of security. Faith in God is a priority and a preventive, not a remedy!

FRIDAY

Lies are crucified, and so is truth. The way of the transgressor is no softer than it used to be; neither is the way of redeeming love. And just there we come on the secret that unlocks the whole mystery. The cross of Christ was either a tragic incident which meant that his kind of life was futile and impotent; or it was the supreme symbol of God's conquering presence in the world that he made, a mercy and justice and peace so closely akin to the Eternal that they could be nailed down and still win!

SATURDAY

You know what you're facing. Somewhere you want to take to your heels. That much I know. You want to give up, let the thing go, quit it cold. You'll climb down to the level of your own naked impulse. But—can you see yourself doing it? Does the coward's part really fit the picture? You, Christ's you, with what he has planned, and will yet bring to pass? And these others around you, this "cloud of witnesses"?

Eighth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

God, our Father, we thank thee for the revelation of thyself to us, thou who at sundry times and in divers manners didst speak unto the fathers by the prophets, but in these days hast spoken to us by thy son. Show us thy glory, whose face we may not see save in him whom thou didst send; and in him deliver us, not just from peril, not just from pain, but out of the bondage of our narrow, selfish ways into the freedom of thy love—for his name's sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

Christian freedom always has its limitations: you are only as free as the servants of God, no less, no more.

MONDAY

If I could manage God, I wouldn't have much confidence left in him! Nobody is going to wheedle him, or fool him, or escape him! He won't interfere much. He won't step in and adjust things, as the government tries to do, every time life gets in a muddle. That wouldn't be treating persons as persons; and he'll always do that! He won't force anybody to decide as he wants. He'll let you make your own choice unimpeded. But he'll keep you, while you're at it, under those terrible blazing lights of eternity, where even angels veil their faces! That's the awful dignity that belongs to persons, and there's no getting away from it!

TUESDAY

We are Aryans, believe it or not. We bluster and wear gold braid. We pile up a big balance in the bank, purchase wide acres, hail from New York, Miami, and Bar Harbor all at once, pretend, fight. Like some prince of the blood who has despised his rightful inheritance and shut himself out of it, taken him a house in a mean and gossipy village, and there tried to find some misshapen outlet for the royal habit of his mind. It would be a tragedy of the first water to watch him sink away into peevish madness, from a throne to a broken chair by the stove in a smelly little post office, snarling and snapping at his neighbors. It is what happens inevitably when these

human lives of ours, fashioned for God, sell their birth-right for one of the petty slaveries of the world.

WEDNESDAY

Here is how it is when a man starts with God. In that hour I am free to be the self that God sees, instead of the self from which I keep trying so hard to escape, with a kind of nausea: free to quit running around after happiness; because right where I am, here and now, I am standing at the very center of the truest happiness that can ever come to me.

THURSDAY

To be free is to be engaged, wherever you may happen to be, in what is essentially an endless moral and spiritual adventure: an adventure which moves by means of a continuous and progressive adjustment to that which is ultimately real in the universe, and results in the unhampered achievement of a whole and genuine selfhood,

As actors in a stately role,
To some triumphant close. . . .

It is that continuous adjustment to reality which constitutes the very mainspring of freedom. In that lies the secret of man's ability to become whatever it is that at his best he is capable of being. Another has set down the manner of it for all the following ages: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

FRIDAY

This "everlasting, undying, untiring Spirit" that refuses to let men go even when they forget him; clings to them through all their blindness, with a compassion that is never soft, but always quite ready to tear up and expose and root out the evil with a high hand, taking the scars of it on himself: a creative, defenseless Love that will have its own way if anybody will let it!—the cross is not a symbol of that: the cross is that!

SATURDAY

Here is the "offense" of the gospel: not its wonder-stories, which many would dismiss, and so have done with the whole fantastic business; but its persistent upsetting of even our religious applecarts. The real threat to human life lies in trying to have done with that! Mark Twain once said that what troubled him about the Bible was not what he failed to understand, but what he understood, and all too clearly. It is not with what we like, but with what we very flatly do not like, that we are somehow to make friends.

Ninth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

God, we thank thee for this love-haunted world!
Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy
name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's
sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

It is common enough to say that God's justice is tempered with mercy, and by it mean that he will tip the beam of his reckoning with the finger of his compassion. He will err a little on the side of long-suffering. But to temper does not mean to tamper. To temper steel is to make it hard and elastic like a Damascus blade, to give it tone and vigor. It is God's mercy that gives his justice its cutting edge.

It were loss indeed to lose out of the heart of the Christian gospel the rigors of that justice. There are terrors in God's steadiness, and history itself is for witness. There is something terrible on this earth, and it is not just sin; it is the way sin runs into God, and he will not move.

MONDAY

The center is not in self or in others, but in God; with a radius that is neither mind nor will, but love. To be "righteous" is to stand in the relationship of love with the God who is righteous.

TUESDAY

When you meet trouble with a truism you make trouble. To say that whatever apparent discrepancies there are in the divine ordering of the universe will be set right in good time may qualify you, strangely enough, as either a wise man or a fool: a wise man for believing it, a fool for saying it. Far better to acknowledge the mystery—which remains mystery for all your pains. Better still to have traveled that way yourself in faith and fortitude. Some-

thing may happen then. Not otherwise. Meanwhile, no short cuts! No fool's gold that can pave nothing but a fool's paradise. One might wish, for instance, that hate were born only of blindness, that love would come with sight. Poets have said so—and in saying so have got no more than the soles of their feet wet in the facts. Ignorance is not the only "maker of hell"; nor do "sympathy, charity, kindness" always come of knowledge. They come of love, which has its cradle neither in blindness nor in sight, but elsewhere—in the very heart of the mystery.

WEDNESDAY

The simple fact is that the cross never stayed on the hill where they put it. It marched out across the Roman Empire. It leaped on those proud standards and got itself emblazoned there. It fluttered over Europe, in dark forests, on lonely castles. And began to point the patient centuries to a better way of treating men than man had found. It brought them face to face with the stark reality of love's triumph where hate would always fail.

THURSDAY

It is precisely the love of God that manifests itself in his justice. It is the justice of God that carries, as the only cutting edge it has, God's love. That love is concerned about men, whatever they are, good men and bad men, not for its own sake, but for theirs. It asks Cain, "Where is thy brother Abel?" But it asks Abel too, "Where is thy brother Cain?" It asks those who are up and in about those who are down and out. The love that is at the heart of the universe is a stern and splendid thing, deep and tragic.

FRIDAY

The cross is any place where a saving love goes out to undergird this life of ours, and comes back with the hot stab of nails in its hands!

SATURDAY

Most of the effective counsel given by friend or loved one, by pastor or psychiatrist, is neither admonition nor exhortation. The best word for it is contagion.

Tenth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Cleanse us, we beseech thee, O God, and deliver us from all other fears save that fear of thy name, which is the coming among us of thy holy love. In Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Facts! It's one thing to spend your days toiling along in the ugly face of the present, counting over its liabilities on your fingers when your mind is too dull to count—staring in the night at the way things are going, with wide, burning eyes, when you ought to be asleep, wondering how you can ever stop that dreadful drift!

Faith! It's another thing entirely, with all of that unpromising material there in front of you, and the worn-out tools still in your hands, to straighten the tired, bent muscles of your back and by the grace of God let your gaze wander away until it's caught and held again by the dream you have had of that which is to be!

MONDAY

The only way to preserve a faith is to use it.

TUESDAY

Good heavens, aren't we ever going to see anything but our own defeats! Leave that wisdom out which has our life in charge, as if it were blind and impotent? Has God died, or given up, or gone away? When some hope of yours flickers out, can't you look yonder and tighten your belt, and say, "Well, that hasn't upset any of God's plans!"

WEDNESDAY

The question we've got to put to ourselves is perfectly clear. We've got to face every situation in life with it. We've got to ask, not "What is there here that's against me?" but "What is there here that's against God?"

THURSDAY

To commit oneself to God is to make no detour around adversity.

FRIDAY

Faith is still another thing men come seeking of us. Do we find it such difficult business holding on to our own that there is hardly enough for us, let alone a margin for anybody else? In one painting of the Crucifixion the hands of God may be seen, through the darkness that shrouds the cross, supporting the two pierced hands of Jesus, and beyond, the face of God, fuller still of agony than the face of the Crucified, with the thorns on its brow. Facing the facts is gallant work. But what facts? And did you find God in any of them? Were there no hands back of them, and no face? It is not realism just to grit your teeth and clench your fists and run out and get in the dirt. Nobody will swing along more bravely for it. Or less bravely for the man who lifted up his clear eyes on Calvary and said, even in that desperate place, seeing as he saw, "It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

SATURDAY

If Christianity is not true, there is very little percentage to be had from playing about with it on the theory that it is comfortable.

Eleventh Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Uphold us, O God we beseech thee, by thy mighty power, that in all things thy gracious will may be done, and that good work which thou hast begun in us be made perfect. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Prodigals leave home because elder brothers stay there. There are "stale saints" and "attractive sinners"; and there are times when the relationship between them is nothing less—and nothing more—than cause and effect. The church that is not somewhere in the slums, the church of the unconcerned, whether in peace or in war, Dives' church, would do well to tear down its steeple and quit pretending to point a finger at the sky.

MONDAY

What would happen to me, said a man to his friend, if I tried to carry on my business as Christ would want me to do it? I'd be ruined! And what will happen to you if you don't, the other asked him quietly. What kind of ruin do you want?

TUESDAY

There is a sense in which freedom may be defined as the very image in us of God's own being. It can scarcely be called an inalienable right. It shows itself in human history as an interminable quest.

WEDNESDAY

Christianity becomes decisive, and God a conscious necessity, to the man who has quit underestimating life; and then has begun to shoulder his appropriate share of the load which that life at the moment is thrusting on all of us.

THURSDAY

You may not like the doctrine of a Fall; but you've got to face the fact of it! You may not think in terms of our Adversary the Devil; but you've got to think in terms of what the apostles called his handiwork: pride and ambition and selfishness—this huge drift toward the precipice! They are the first enemies of your peace and mine. Find out to what extent, by the grace of this cleansing and crucified Christ, you can get rid of them; and your life will grow measurably placid.

FRIDAY

You cannot leave to others the doing of what really needs to be done! If this vision you have of God does not move and drive and pull and tug and wrench and twist and hold and stride and walk off grimly after him, it is nothing. We stultify it when we use it as a solace and no more. We prostitute it when we hitch it to some private little enterprise against headaches and nervous breakdowns. This is to take the power of God that swings the stars in their orbits and ask it to do nothing but the household chores. It was designed to grip a world and to shape human history, and we have to give it passage.

SATURDAY

Some of us acquire a conscience that grows weary of operating at home where it belongs, and after rubbing its hands a while and looking around, begins to operate on the neighbors. We go up to somebody one day and we say to him, Now look here. My conscience compels me to tell you—then you just listen how nasty it turns out to be!

The queerest, ugliest things happen to us sometimes when we clench our teeth like that and strike our forehead with the palm of our hand and start out grimly to do our duty!

Twelfth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

As we lift our eyes to the cross, O God, so lift up our hearts as in no other place: that of thy patient love we may know ourselves clean forgiven, and for thy very defeat victorious. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

God doesn't seem to make it very clear what he's actually about. Life is forever sticking its head around a corner when we aren't looking and crying out "Surprise! Surprise!" And it isn't always a pleasant surprise.

MONDAY

It is easy for us now to see what it was all along that had been holding Nicodemus back. They were the things that hold us back from the kind of loyalty this Christ keeps asking of us. There was his position. To have that pulling one way and the truth pulling another was not pleasant: salutations in the market place, respect, influence on this side, contempt, and futility, and who knows what else on the other? There was stuff out of which to fashion many a sleepless night! And we are not strangers to it. Just let this Christianity come cutting across our privileges, as it cut across his, and you will see: when we have to shave the edges of honesty a bit or lose our jobs; when it is a question of economic justice against a fistful of real estate or a private bank account.

TUESDAY

We like to get rid of God by identifying him with the "good"; and his good so often upsets our own! We identify him with the "true"; and his truth contradicts our truth, day in and day out! We identify him with the "beautiful"; we are all for beauty! You cannot tell how much we love God by the tricks we play to be quit of him!

WEDNESDAY

If it's a burden that's laid on us, it's the burden of love; and what if there were no freedom for you anywhere once you get out from under that! In his play, *No Exit*, Sartre says that Hell is—other people! And the New Testament goes on saying, "Ah, God pity us, but there is no other heaven!"

THURSDAY

In the New Testament the one never-failing refuge is at the foot of a cross. Nowhere else is the peace which passes understanding. It steals into your heart under and over and around every sorrow and every sin. But it is more than peace. It is a Voice calling. A Voice which is our peril.

FRIDAY

Why do we want God's faithfulness to be other than it is? On Calvary it contradicts all our contradictions, and is so terrifyingly fixed, as the law of gravity is fixed, that when you fool with it you only prove it!

SATURDAY

In the breach between life and faith, life becomes demonic. Give the Golden Rule no more than a secular context and see what happens: if I want others to share their liquor and their narcotics with me, I must share mine with them; either that or I must reduce the entire transaction to the dimensions of "Do unto others—first!" I have heard the Great Commandment used as if it were the sum of religion. It isn't. It's the sum of the law and the prophets. Without the gospel in front of it, it's little more than sound advice!

Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

O God, who art eternally both merciful and just,
be thou our God: and that not in our way but in
Thine. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The gospel of Jesus Christ stands squarely in the way of every tendency, every drift or pattern of thought or conduct, that would shut human life up within itself, and so, robbing it of both its meaning and its destiny, reduce it little by little to the category of the subhuman. It is a gospel that does not address itself to some fragmentary end, like the preservation of democracy or of civilization. There are times when civilization is past saving. There are times when it is no longer worth saving! The gospel devotes itself to the task of providing the soil out of which democracy and civilizations spring. It devotes itself to the recovery, and preservation through use, of those freedoms which give Freedom birth, and without which nobody can ever be anything but less than he is. It confronts the human soul with God.

MONDAY

God is eager; but we shall not draw his attention to us with cantrap, a few passes in the air, the abracadabra of religion, fee-faw-fum! Something has to happen which is like a distant shout, with all the pent-up longing of a man's soul in it. You get away into a far country, as the lad did in the parable. You may have to feed the swine, too, with the husks you should like to eat. But then you come to yourself, pray God: that is the least you could do. And you make up your mind, by the little touch of him left in you, to get back on your feet out of the mire.

TUESDAY

Some of us are inclined to think that the gospel is all very lovely and idyllic. We have a notion that it was in-

tended primarily to comfort us in this wretched world. The rude offense of the cross is hidden away under flowers. A gallows turned into a floral tribute!—for use at funerals! Jesus is represented as amazingly gentle, a good deal gentler than he ever was, and becomes the mild friend of man. God himself is little more than the superlative of human kindness, and couldn't possibly be hard on anyone! We sing "Come Hither, Ye Faithful," but leave out that phrase about "the angels' dread King." It isn't good for children. One of our books takes the old Russian hymn which used to read, "God the All-terrible King who ordaineth," and makes it start, "God the All-merciful."

If we don't quit that kind of milk-and-water nonsense now, we shall soon be much worse off than we have ever been. Our sensitive, tender little delicacies won't get us very far.

WEDNESDAY

When we get stirred up about things in general and the going gets rough, we suppose we'd better pack our bags for a return to religion: which is what we seem to be doing at the moment! Though nobody is quite clear as to what religion we're returning to! God may be a very present help in time of trouble, but he's no escape from it.

THURSDAY

Paul insists that the Christian religion means one thing only: it means that God has a mind to do something with his own creation; and he won't ever do it by himself. He has to have you to do it with, if life is to be anything more than a puppet show; not people soothed once a week by

the prospect of their own salvation, but human wills bound over today and tomorrow to that kindest will of all. No matter what happened in Bethlehem, no matter what happened at Calvary, only so can human history be kept from lurching its way to ruin. Having then gifts—what of it? Are you ready to lay them where they belong, in the creative hands of God? If you are, that's religion. If you aren't, it's make-believe!

FRIDAY

The story can still be told simply: When they were come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified him. But it cannot even now be simply dismissed. It keeps haunting you with the sense of undiscovered worlds, as if you had never really quite seen or understood it: the dark, mordant mystery of sin, persistent and dreadful; the mystery of triumphant assurance, lifting up its head in that most desolate spot with the light of God's mercy on it; and this last, which I think is the greatest mystery of all, that I, being myself but a poor object of his grace, am nevertheless one other hope, one other chance God has for his world!

SATURDAY

He that is in Christ is a new creation. But the man who fixes his eye first and foremost on the new creation is not in Christ!

Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Not our thought of thee, O God—let thy thought for us hold our eyes and keep us steadfast. We do not ask so much for the strength which thou hast promised as for the grace to use what thou hast already supplied in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Never is life so insecure as when we take hold of it; never is it safer than when we lay it in God's hands. That moment is a creative moment. It is not at all where we quit; it is where we may truly begin.

MONDAY

The ultimate fact about this common life of ours is that we are called into it to enrich it. There's no other reason for our being here, aside from what happens to us in the process. God has appointed us as creators with him in a world that is forever uncreated, never finished, always a dream in that Other Mind. Today he is issuing to us his challenge that in obedient fellowship with him we form and fashion toward that infinite dream some fragment of reality where we are. It's from this deep and underlying urge that we never seem quite able to escape. Not only spiritual health, but mental health as well turns apparently on our response to it. I believe that we are creators by nature from birth. Until somewhere it can stand shoulder to shoulder with this Master-Workman in his gnarled and knotted task of shaping a world to his taste, the soul is as helpless as Noah's dove that could find no rest for her feet but flew disconsolately back to beat her wings against the bare shutters of the ark. So far are we in his image, makers of heaven and earth, as he goes suffering his way through our bitter life, beckoning to us from cross to cross, giving us gifts!

TUESDAY

No matter if you are worse than the average, or better, or just as good: you know how sick you can get of you;

when all the best there is about you would enjoy very much spewing all the rest there is about you out of its mouth. The Christian religion says it can change that: until life is full of zest again, not stale, up and out of its ruts; so that even an eternity of it would not prove nauseating.

WEDNESDAY

All the privileges we have are ours only on condition that we hold them in trust. There's no other effective method under God's sun of clinging to them.

THURSDAY

Somewhere along the road, hundreds of thousands of years ago, humanity discovered that it had picked up a mind in the process of becoming human—so the textbooks indicate. The Bible shrugs its shoulders at that and keeps saying, Well, in any case, God gave it to them! I can't figure it out any other way either, whether it was little by little, or all at once. However, the upshot of it was that man had quite a plaything on his hands! He could outwit nature with it three times in five and the dumb animals six times in four! If he looked sharp, he could get ahead of Tom, Dick, and Harry to boot! So he began to assume that brains are what it takes. Keener logic and better reasons. Over the years everybody went all out for that assumption—except the few in every generation who always have preferred just to depend on their good looks! And life turned on this one of its aspects into a magnificent epic; multitudes climbing up out of the dark, striking off the shackles of ignorance and superstition—with their godlike faculties scanning the farthest horizons of their universe.

That's everything, said the Greeks. Altogether enough.
That's what life is about.

And it isn't.

FRIDAY

To be free is to plunge into human life "up to the elbows," without looking at the price tag, or wondering about the pay-off! To take inside what's outside, never mind how much it hurts! And to see few things out there and more faces! Something had happened to the inside of the poet who on an autumn evening "saw the ruddy moon lean over the hedge like a red-faced farmer," while all "about were the wistful stars with white faces, like town children." The moon and the stars were a farmer and the village teacher's brood! It wasn't the pain that broke Jesus' heart. It was the faces! It may even have been the faces—in what deep sense?—that made him cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Do you want to travel that road? Freedom has to, if it's to be the freedom that belongs to the servants of God.

SATURDAY

One often wonders whenever the choice is really ours, what we would have done with it, had we too been troubled with omniscience, as God is. His choices must not be so simply made, or painless for him. To trust that wisdom which is beyond our own, reckoning on the power that in all things works for good with those who answer his love with theirs—what might that not make of life, the life of which so many say they can make nothing at all?

Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

We are never lonely, Father, through any fault of thine. Give us grace to yield ourselves, body, mind, and soul, that we may be found of thee. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

SUNDAY

God's textbook on economics starts out with the supposition that not only theoretically but very practically life belongs to him. This world is not God's by human courtesy: it's his by eminent domain.

MONDAY

Now and then a lawyer in the courtroom will call out "Exception!" You can't do that to the judgments of God! Jesus didn't say, to that crowd on the hillside in Galilee, "I can see how it is that being hard-working people, horny-handed sons of toil, you find it so difficult to be meek and merciful and poor in spirit. Remember if you can though that it's a good thing to turn the other cheek once in a while. And whatever else you do, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, at least, Judge not, that ye be not judged!"

TUESDAY

"What do you possess . . . that has not been given you? And if it was given you, why do you boast as if it had been gained, not given?" I sometimes wonder how we ever got the idea that we own anything. Certainly we are living in a world that does not belong to us. We do not own our talents. Whatever the capacity we have, all of it came straight out of the blue; and we have no sure and lasting tenure on any of it. Maybe someday we shall quit acting like proprietors and start behaving like guests.

WEDNESDAY

The world isn't ours. We need not be afraid that God's will is going to pull us around with a rope about our neck. He's courteous, too. But it will be served. And if there is any wisdom left in us at all, we'll serve it of ourselves and consciously. We'll not always know what he's doing; but we'll know that great people may count for nothing in it, or less, as he moves on down the years, keeping his mission of love somehow within human history and yet forever over it! And we'll stand up if we must, whatever the consequences today and tomorrow; we'll stand up and defy the whole drift of this transient life if that's the only way we can maintain our firm hold on God's eternal ends!

THURSDAY

It was not creation that showed God great; it was Jesus, this eternal light on the hearth of our poor earth, this eternal love like the beating of blood behind a sleepless brow: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! slaying the prophets and stoning those who have been sent to you! How often I would fain have gathered your children as a fowl gathers her brood under her wings"—think of God's remembering that from the back yard at Nazareth! "How often! But you would not." What was vast was "the fluttering of this veil of silence" which rests over our hurt world: the glory that stirred for a moment at last and then grew strangely still again—for little people. That was new.

And with it God pulled out the diapason stop on his mighty organ.

FRIDAY

If Jesus means anything, there are tears in God's eyes. It's a human way of speaking, but nobody from Genesis to

the Revelation was ever afraid of that! If there is no struggle in God's heart to correspond with this that's going on in the heart of Jesus, then the Old Testament and the New have been at great pains to say nothing at all. Every time these pages allow us to listen in on God, he's strangely like his own Man of Sorrows.

SATURDAY

I find more awe in my soul when I come before Christ with all my faculties alert, than when I stand on a hilltop of a summer's night and gaze out into the fathomless space between the stars.

Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

For all that we know of thee, O God, and for all thou art which is beyond our knowing, we give thanks. Do thou make plain to us each day thy will, with so much of thy love as shall hold us, and so much of thy strength as shall be level to our need. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

SUNDAY

We are obsessed with whereases and therefore. The Jews never were. They did not stick their thumb into the cosmos like Jack Horner, with a huge sense of moral superiority about them, and pull out the plum of a Divine Artificer. They did not look at history and jump to the conclusion of a moving finger that writes and having writ moves on. They took God for granted, as you take the air you breathe.

MONDAY

Man's pride will sooner justify itself in blasphemy than surrender itself to sheer wanton, arbitrary power. And properly so. There is something else in God besides wayward, contrary, captious might, and something other. Man may assert his rights against man if there is nothing better for him to do—and so help to hammer out for his society some kind of approximate justice. He may assert them against nature, and out of her rough granite hew for himself a kind of progress. His struggles are chapters in the history of civilizations. Always he wins, and always he loses: his victories, almost incredible, every one of them ambiguous, none of them final. But against God? What "right" has being to assert against the ground of being? What "right" has the mind to assert itself against the life that animates it? Yet where there is no right against, there may be claim upon. It is God who has himself acknowledged man's created claim upon his love, fashioned humanity's "rights" and honors them.

TUESDAY

Every man of us has his Egypt, and the odds against breaking away from it are inside odds, not outside. We are ourselves the odds! What else does the cross mean, and in the shadow of it still this undaunted word, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward!"

WEDNESDAY

We have to remember that the things which have not gone as we expected them to go are most often the very things which show God to be God still.

THURSDAY

"Why should I care?" For no reason, save for this: that since Christ there is more surely than ever something in the world that keeps taking off its hat in your presence, and ringing in your ears the sound of an ancient voice which says continually, Son of Man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak to thee.

FRIDAY

Our talk, individually and corporately, about safeguarding these human rights is the kind of sense which nonsense sometimes makes. We have an inalienable right. It's the right to God; we can keep this clear, can't we? . . . and he safeguarded it with a cross and a man stretched out!

SATURDAY

When all the questions are in, God himself becomes the questioner. The ultimate dilemma of human existence lies not in God's failure to answer man but in man's inability of himself to answer God.

Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Still this day thy steady hand is on our souls, Jesus, Son of Mary. Of thy great might keep us from falling; and of thy deep compassion, never let us go! For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SUNDAY

Come at history with the will of a holy and righteous God in the forefront of your mind, and you'll see how much sense it makes. So too with these lives of ours. They aren't just something we're doing; they are also something that's being done to us. Modern man thinks he's put upon by God. The realities we call into question or bring into contempt tell on us terribly. There are times when the Almighty is one of them.

MONDAY

If I have created God, I can dispense with him: I shall content myself in very deed with "the stable balance of the natural world"; with "man's secure biological heritage"; with "the growing and conserving continuum of racial experience." Must we be confronted both from without and from within by Another who can never be understood until he speaks to us, in whose very Being alone, and in the Word that clarifies it, lies the stature of our freedom? Whose impingement upon our wretched world Job so impiously protested; yet found in it at last the only inclusive, transcendent meaning which could gather up the manifold discords of human life and transmute them into "a total harmony"?

TUESDAY

The tragedy of our world is that men aren't content to explore the kind of life for which they were intended: aware of their true and exalted station on this earth, they have set out to *be* God!

WEDNESDAY

There is something thrilling about life when you see it whole—something majestic: the sweat and the blood, the joy and the tragedy. And to see yourself as part of it, moving across this stupendous stage against the backdrop of eternity! The challenge of that is like the challenge of bugles. It's like the restless rattling of drums in the dark. I like throwing myself into it. Not into a job; a man can get sick of a job: but into God's own magnificent march, and the thunder of his feet!

THURSDAY

We who are Christians stand on the perilous edge of things, not knowing if God will be kind to us, as we say, or to anybody else; take care of our feelings, see to it that we profit or enjoy ourselves! We're here to be his people. That puts every lower motive in its place, throws our weight where it belongs. Who knows what we'll encounter anywhere? And who cares—if some gleam of that Eternal Splendor comes to dwell in our faces, and God's creative compassion for all the tired and battling souls of men begins to find its way out through us into human life!

FRIDAY

H. G. Wells used to insist that the prospect of heaven, with its pearly gates and golden streets, was altogether too much of an enticement to righteousness. He preferred to be good—for nothing! And no man can be, in a world that is God's world. There is always something. Virtue is its own reward, but not its only reward. There is a harvest to the sower. Friendship has its benefits. So does piety. God makes something of the pious—at cost.

SATURDAY

Portents are in reality promises. They are God's judgment on the wicked and the assurance of his mercy to the upright, to those who stand in faith, not fear. The dark symbols of despair are to become the bright badges of hope. Is it not strange that men say, "We have tried everything, we must leave the issue now in the hands of God"? They say it as if matters had indeed come to a pretty pass! From the very first, where else was the issue? It is not he who is guilty of the bungling; we are. Yet we insist on thinking of him last, when all the rope is paid out, and there is nothing left but to put our fingertips together and roll our eyes heavenward.

Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

In thy will is our only peace: in thy will shall we find thine. Against everything that gets in the way of thy will, even against us, be thyself, O God, to redeem us by such means as thou wilt, out of our darkness into thy light. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Miracles are altogether too embarrassing in a world where by and large, exceedingly by and very large, they have withdrawn from the scene. Men work them now—which helps to keep the world alive in this so-called post-Christian culture of ours. Men work them with cyclotrons and luniks. Why raise the question about God's knowledge of his universe or about his resourcefulness, when all we need to do is to capitalize on our own?

MONDAY

God himself must find it hard to make any music of the spheres, with this world looking up into his face, grinning at him with its evil, doing him the distant honor of high words maybe, then going about its business as if he did not exist; fighting back at his goodness, venting its spleen in plain nastiness—its lust, its greed, its mad little power, with never more than a few here and there to treat life like a holy thing!

TUESDAY

The skeptic will tell you that faith makes no sense. He's right about that. It makes no more sense than one of Camus' characters makes in *The Plague*—indeed not as much! He has just looked on at the agonized death of a little child, and he says, "I will never love any scheme of things which permits that."

Observe, however, as a matter of some significance, surely, what a strange sort of noise those words would make on Calvary. "And when they were come to the place . . . there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." Now let's try it: "I

will never love any scheme of things which permits that." It isn't a "scheme of things," anyway, that the Christian loves. And what loving he does he doesn't do because he has scraped together all the evidence he could find in favor of it, and chucked out the rest. You don't fall in love that way.

WEDNESDAY

"God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of his son." "No one who believes on him will ever be disappointed." If that is what the psychologists mean by wishful thinking, I can only say that fairy tales are not accustomed to do what it has done. Lies that successfully masquerade as truth for twenty centuries are indeed potent lies! It must be a muscular brand of nonsense that subdues kingdoms, stops the mouths of lions, quenches the violence of fire, waxes valiant in fight!

THURSDAY

I have a book on my shelves that's called *The Logic of Belief*. I find it exceedingly helpful, now that I already believe. It furnishes me with so many reasons for believing that would never have occurred to me! But my faith didn't come by way of logic. Yours didn't either. It came one day when I had to settle for what I had seen, and a lump was in my throat, and nothing else for me could ever take the place of that strange Man of Nazareth, and God seemed to be moving toward me with the world in his heart, and what he planned to do for it, however much or little, as if he meant to do it with nobody and nothing but me!

FRIDAY

Life is made up of details, and the judgments of God turn on them. What else is there for him to use? What else is there that has filled the whole stage now with war and the crumbling of systems and the ruin of empires! Let him tell you what matters: "I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison," and you let it slide. That sounds homespun; and it's history. They don't write it in textbooks, and you don't study it; but it's the only history God thinks it worth while to set down!

SATURDAY

The best that man knows is God's gift, and the gift must be like the giver. It is wrong to assume that God and man can have nothing in common. There is a transvaluation of values, not a contradiction or a cancellation of them.

Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Grant us, O God, to hear thy voice; and in hearing thy voice, to love thy Word; and in loving thy Word, to do thy will. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The world of the Bible isn't the world of Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or Moses or David or Isaiah. It isn't even the world of Christ and his apostles. It is the world of God. That's what the Bible is about. Not about men, not about history, not about morals, not about doctrine: about God.

MONDAY

The Bible is not supposed to discover lost things or to stop bleeding noses; or to decide who is right in a dispute; or to suggest whose side God is on in some war; or to hold out personal favors; or to provide us with proof texts for prohibition or pacifism; or with the blueprints of a new social order.

TUESDAY

The good news of God is that you are invited to meet him. That's why the Bible reads like such a strange book. The world of the Bible is a place of meeting. It isn't an empty world like ours, where big is big and little is little and 90 per cent of almost everything is nothing. It's a place where you are forever running into an infinite mind and coming upon the yearning of an eternal heart.

WEDNESDAY

The Bible knows that it isn't just a record, the story of Israel, or the story of Jesus, or the story of the Church. It knows itself only as God's story—the History that becomes history. Not just something he did once. I can get tired of

hearing about that. Why doesn't he do it again? And the Bible keeps saying that even as we read he *is* doing it again! Moving in on life now, as he moved in on it when he called Moses, and brought his people up and away from their bondage in Egypt; as he moved in on it when John the Baptist went into the wilderness to tell everybody who would come that something tremendous was about to happen. And it does! Men and women led out into a freedom so strange it makes them afraid; and they run back, and turn their religion into a set of rules, so that they can become slaves again! But if anybody wants to be rid of anything that cripples his life, he can be. He can have the shackles struck off, as I saw them fall off of a young woman who had been the leader of a dope ring in New York City. It happens, and it happens of all places inside that book! He has contracted to change these written words into his living Word, the very offer of himself!

THURSDAY

Preaching is the announcement of what God has done, and mark this: in the announcement he does it again! The Word which is proclaimed is more than a message from God: it's a living Word which reconstitutes what it recounts, will not return to him void, accomplishes that whereunto it is sent. Who will dare to despise it? Preaching is the mediation of that Word whereby God himself enters the scene.

FRIDAY

Three crosses in all, and the issue of three lives. On one, death came down with a taunt, like the world's last grin,

dark and sterile and hopeless. On another it came in a sudden shaft of light, as of the sun striking its way through the clouds to etch out of the shadows a face with a prayer on its lips and a brooding glory in its eyes: "Lord, remember me." Between them, to divide the two this way and that, as far as heaven is from hell, the Word of God, at its uttermost become deed!

SATURDAY

That's what all those pages of the Book mean to me: Love trying across the gulf to pronounce its own Name in syllables never to be forgotten—never—never!

Twentieth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Grant us, O God, to hear thy voice; and in what we think is thy silence, bring us still to listen. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

Worship is itself the sacrament of meeting, where, as William Temple has said, the conscience is quickened by God's holiness, the mind fed with his truth, the imagination purged by his beauty, the heart opened to his love, the will devoted to his purpose; but only *because* it is not his holiness, or his truth, or his beauty, or his love, or his purpose that he reveals. It is himself that he bestows in that solemn act of recognition—"Father, I have sinned". . . . "My son, my son!"—which issues in the sudden shelter of those arms and the kiss that stops the mouth of your poor little memorized speech.

MONDAY

The God of the Bible will not lend himself to our decoration. He is naked God! There are no devices by which we can get him to fit in with our plans, no patterns by which we can make him over into our image.

TUESDAY

The good life is the sharing of God's life. Behind the willing to do God's will is the ministry of God's Spirit. Behind the imperative, the indicative. To do or not to do is by no means the choice in front of us: the choice is to be or not to be. To be and not to do, however hard to relate them in practice, is a contradiction in terms. The being is sonship. The not doing is idolatry.

WEDNESDAY

The drift in human history is never away from religion itself, but only away from a religion with God at the heart

of it toward a religion without any God at all except of our own making. The central problem is not godlessness. It never is. The central problem is always idolatry. "*Der Mensch*, says Luther, *hat immer Gott oder Abgott.*" (Man has God at all times: the true God or false god!)

THURSDAY

Take any page of the Bible and strip it of God, as we strip our lives, down to the bone, until that infinite mind is away somewhere, and the yearning of that eternal heart is only a grand "perhaps," and you will be back in the world with which you are already too familiar. A sower sowing his seed will be just a sower sowing his seed; this it is and nothing more. A dead sparrow by the side of the road will be just a dead sparrow by the side of the road, and who cares? Who in hell cares, or who in heaven? And all of it is dull and stale and flat and unprofitable; it makes people sick! What the Bible keeps saying is that we can swap our world for that other, where there are three dimensions, and everything is a parable of the Kingdom of God; and we can swap it whenever we like. Worship is about that.

FRIDAY

The only authentic glory at the heart of all created things is this love that stirs for a moment and is still; the final majesty of the Eternal God, that lonely figure, with his hands and feet pierced for such little people because he thought they were great!

SATURDAY

A man has no love for his country if he is willing for all he cares or does to let the state take God's place.

Twenty-first Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Hear us, O God, in each unspoken prayer, as our hands reach out toward thee, and we are still with awe before the sureness and the greatness of thy love. Open our ears that the deep silence at the heart of life may be to us what thou wouldst have it, the very sound of thy passing: and take the dullness of our souls away. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The silences of God are themselves vocal. When public officials are pressed for their interpretation of events, they often decline to commit themselves. "No comment" is all that can be got out of them. God does no such thing. His silences mean either that there is something the matter with us—an idea which scarcely ever seems to occur to anybody!—or that there is something in him—his wisdom? his love?—that makes waiting necessary.

MONDAY

Certainly, among other things, we ought to call a halt to all our loose talk about seeking God. Loose talk has done Christianity incalculable harm. I have never heard that God was lost. If he is, then space and eternity are much too big for me to find him in either of them.

TUESDAY

God is often most where he seems to be least. Psalm 22, for instance, was written during or shortly after the Jews' captivity. There they were, praying for deliverance, with everybody laughing at them. Fear stalked around naked. Their hearts were like wax. Yet through those bitter, bitter years, and firmer for them, came the world's most precious heritage: this human faith in the God of human history. It grew up into its own under the heel of a conqueror, marched through fire, and was clean. Against the oncoming centuries it set itself, against the ravages of war, and blazed the way to Christ. God forsaken? God controlled! He had been in front of them, and behind them, and all around them—helping them most when there was no help.

WEDNESDAY

The verb "to wait" speaks to us of our insecurity. It speaks to us of a God we do not already know, and do not already have. We do not already have him in some doctrine or in some church. We do not already know him in some book or in some experience. "Wait, I say, on the Lord." It's a word which gives us solemn warning that we live all our days on the dreadful margin between knowing and not knowing, between having and not having.

THURSDAY

Paul's word for patience means in Greek a being under some heavy weight, like Atlas, and staying there—there's not a flabby muscle in it!—a stretching, straining, and twisting, like a wrestler who won't let go, not even when he's down, keeps grabbing for an arm, or a leg, squirming out from under and on top! And it doesn't come of reading a few pages, or having a few shining ideals held up in front of you.

FRIDAY

The cross is the whispered word of a God travel-stained and footsore, seeking someone, ever away from home, whispering a name. They say the search began in a garden in the cool of the day among the trees where a man stood, trembling and ashamed, and a woman with him, listening to a voice that seemed at first like the sad murmur of leaves. "Adam!—Adam!—Where art thou?" It may be that you spell the name of the garden Eden; but the God who walked there will never be a stranger in Gethsemane!

SATURDAY

All that was wrong when Jesus came—the loneliness, the growing tumult of the nations, the world trembling like a leaf: all of that was right, and an arm was over it, bared to the elbow. What men saw as the symbol of their forsakenness was itself the sign of the unsleeping Providence! Everything was where it had always been—in the might of God; and where it was, it was safe! That's why I'm willing to wait even if I should never see the day for which I'm waiting. There are hours when I'm glad that waiting is my high privilege. It's a meager enough return to make him for all that he has done my life long.

Twenty-second Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Speak to us, O God, as thou wilt, and of thy grace cause us to understand, and never be dismayed by understanding, but always, upheld by thy Word, to receive it and rejoice in it. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

"There but for the grace of God, go I," said Richard Baxter, or so the story runs, as he saw a man led away to execution. How much less than grace is it when the murderer mis-shapes it? The grace that keeps the breath in your nostrils, and the strength in your arm—when you raise it to wield a knife, or to pronounce a benediction! A man by heaven's own power can make a hell out of heaven!

MONDAY

When you think that everything is going all right, that you're thoroughly up to it, life is under control, the reins are in your hands—you're taking every bit of it for less than it is, that's all: assuming that it's an easy mark. And you were never wider of that mark! This is why the so-called competent people, gorged with self-reliance, are in far greater peril, and on the whole do far greater damage, than the people who are incompetent and know it.

TUESDAY

Christianity is an allegiance fixed, moving about these common streets with the stamp and seal of Forever on it, haunted by the eternal Mind, bearing itself in this its native place like a changeling, exiled from home, yet sure of its kingly state, thrusting out today and tomorrow into "some new and unclaimed and unconquered territory," going down from its rendezvous with God to have its fling with him under the shadow of a cross at the shaping of human history.

WEDNESDAY

The whole Bible, from cover to cover, is concerned with this riddle . . . , whether or not the universe at its center is or ever was intelligent and purposeful and kind; if it means something still, and means that something intensely; if as someone has put it, there is a great yawning hole in the middle of things, through which all energy and vision, all lives and prayers and sacrifice shall be poured at the last and lost—or if God is there! These books from Genesis to Malachi gather all their things together, fill their lungs, and with a mighty shout proclaim that he is: above this weird panorama of our little lives, and there's power in his hands! Nothing that ever happens will make him look queer! It's the nub and point of all the Old Testament has to say really; and the New Testament as well. And it's challenging the world now.

THURSDAY

I don't care what Mr. So-and-So says in his article about how we should treat our enemies, or how we should use our money, or how we should allot our time and energy. What Mr. So-and-So says doesn't matter a bit. Mr. So-and-So isn't running this world. God *is*! What matters *now* is the hand which holds the scepter, and the Mind which was in Christ Jesus. "He that is not with me . . ." so it runs here ". . . is against me." That's what counts.

FRIDAY

"Bear ye one another's burdens." "Every man must bear his own burden." In some deep sense you have in that paradox the very gospel itself from start to finish. For this

is what God did, packed all into a single sentence: He took up into his arms the vast weight of his creation, as he had planned it back there when the morning stars sang together—that weight was his own; but with it he lifted the vaster weight still of our rebellion, which is always crushing it out of shape. And he carried the whole incredible thing to a cross, with the nails coming through as he came through, clean out on the other side. His own burden, and every man's.

SATURDAY

Around all you can remember—these things which you think and say are your life—around them, as if they were tiny boats on an untrammelled sea, stretches the incalculable business of God: memories, the beauty of the earth, hurts healed, this painless breath, love, a star reflected in water, music . . . the ocean of God's love which bears up the little islands of our pain!

Twenty-third Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

In the tumult and trouble of our lives, O God, grant us thy peace: that we may be greater of soul for all that befalls us, and better fitted by our very sorrows for the uses of thy love. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

The pattern of life is far too complex and ambiguous for any man to go about lugging with him a faith which never grows up; has to be kept bundled tightly like a papoose in God's "answers" to his questions, and God's "answers" to his prayers; cannot be set down to stand on its feet in the hurly-burly of a world where success may be a curse and failure a benediction.

MONDAY

One of the few things I really know about this mysterious place under the canopy of the sky is that somehow it seems to be, beyond our explaining, set against God, and after its own fashion against everybody who's like him! So that if you want something to worry about, worry because your life is too easy. When a man's faith is real, its road is liable to be rough! That's the way of the world!

TUESDAY

It is when something happens to make men think God has dropped them out of mind entirely that he most often breaks through the crust of self-reliance and begins to hold his serious conversations with the human soul. The worst times are his times. It would be a pity to miss him, or to suppose that any place is empty.

WEDNESDAY

Perhaps it would be just as well to say right off that such a world for all its difficulties, indeed because of them, is far more interesting and challenging than any other con-

ceivable kind; far more instinct not only with peril, on which human life and the human soul seem to thrive, but also with fairly limitless possibilities for mental and spiritual growth: a God whose quiet strategy it is to be away, but not far, silent except for the footstep and the knocking at a man's door; a place with the sin in it that we have to fight, and the pain in it we have to suffer, and the trouble in it that comes tearing along through the days, where hardship, instead of leaving everybody flat, leaves so many people so much taller than they were before; and a life to be lived which is never willing simply to say what everyone else is saying, wrapped in a shade more pious atmosphere and tied together with but slightly devouter gestures, but is intent on making another Voice heard, ready at the drop of a hat to draw the lines so taut that they sing.

THURSDAY

Three times Paul asked to be rid of some crippling infirmity, and the only answer he got was, "It's enough for you to have my grace." So please—never call it rhetoric when he says that in a world where nothing is yours, if you are Christ's, then—because Christ is God's—life and death, and things present and things to come, all are yours! Over and over again he turned it into prose: five times with the forty stripes he received save one, and the rods with which three times he was beaten; stones and shipwreck, hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness! Poetry for us, God pity us! Prose for him! A pageant, God's pageant, in overalls!

FRIDAY

People tell me now and then, speaking of their life, that they don't like the setup. What if the setup were a cross!

What if it should be God's purpose to conform you and me to the image of his Son; and you know and I know where his Son died. What if he were coming to you here on Calvary out of eternity, through sin and defeat and suffering, all the very darkest things of life, to show you how deep they are, and how ready he is, and how unappalled! Calling to you for nothing but your own eager willingness to be on his side against the world, to throw what weight you have into those great scales for justice and mercy and peace; and for the rest, to fix your sheer confidence where Christ's was fixed, in that ultimate goodness like a Father's care which is not only over history now but within it! And doesn't give up and grow tired or lose heart; but holds on and sees it through—until the very valley of trouble, as an old prophet has it, becomes a door of hope.

SATURDAY

Would you have God spell it all out safely, or do you prefer a brave world? Like this: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." Men have been sure of that even when the tears wouldn't let them see, singing a sort of crazy *Te Deum* in their hearts: confident that God could never be absent anywhere if he wasn't absent the day Jesus died!

Twenty-fourth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

O God, who didst send thy Son, that he who by a tree in Eden once overcame might likewise by a tree outside the city gates be overcome, speak thou in Christ thy Word to us, and in him go with us to thy triumph. Amen.

SUNDAY

The fundamental joy of the Christian religion isn't in living a good life. I can imagine getting tired of that! The fundamental joy of it is in standing with God against some darkness or some void and watching the light come.

MONDAY

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly," says the first Psalm; "he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water." How about a tree, says the New Testament, planted outside the walls of Jerusalem with Jesus on it? Did the Psalmist say "Blessed"? What if the only blessedness you can count on is the kind with which the Hebrew word itself brings you to grips: the blessedness of a man who steadfastly sets his face, as Jesus did, to blaze some sort of trail with his life, and with everything he has to give?

TUESDAY

In suffering and in sorrow, in failure and in despair, there is One whose presence is a melody in the heart, and his very will a song. There is a legend to the effect that Satan, when asked what in heaven he missed most, replied that he missed most "the sound of the trumpets in the morning." The whole ministry of God's redemption makes music out of discord. Henley writes his poem:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

—and gets drunk. Paul, in prison, writes to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice!"—and wins an empire for Christ. Such songs in the night are the cradlesongs of every victory that God has wrought.

WEDNESDAY

Let us withdraw, then, from good report and evil report alike, and step inside, where we are saying something about ourselves, giving it the deference of our own belief, growing accustomed to the thought: puffing ourselves up or running ourselves down, until bit by bit the very stature of our souls responds to the constant suggestion. Nobody on earth can make us feel so bankrupt there as Christ will make us feel; nor can anyone so cover us over with his hand, and set us down, by the grace of God, above the stars among angels and archangels.

THURSDAY

Over and again when men set themselves deliberately to "find the answer," to achieve happiness, to build Utopia, the object of their quest turns out to be a will-o'-the-wisp. Even "goodness" refuses to be pursued. Those who seek after it, like the prodigal's elder brother, very often become the reason why people leave home. Greatness and goodness and happiness and peace simply are not proper ends for any human soul to set up for itself. They are states of being along the road. They are the by-products of a life that has been held steadily, like a ship at sea, to some true course worth sailing. Can it be that along the way of Christ's presence solutions appear of themselves—in parentheses?

FRIDAY

It makes me shiver to remember how often Christ has stood up out of the ruin of ancient and time-honored precedents. Though always at the risk of getting himself lynched! And winning anyhow!

SATURDAY

The Word God sent us is a Word never to be possessed; it is a Word to possess us: normative, but not in its highest function; in its highest function creative, moving beyond judgment into love.

Twenty-fifth Sunday After Trinity

PRAYER

Grant us, O God, to serve thee with our lives, wholly and gladly, that thy patient faith in us may never be betrayed, nor thy brave and stubborn hopes defeated. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

"The time is now—" says the radio announcer, and adds some figures from a dial. "The time is now," says the New Testament, and adds nothing but a period. And that means nothing for the way we live but a revolution! It doesn't just enhance our moral idealism, as someone has phrased it, or underscore our Christian principles, or try to make of us impractical perfectionists. It moves in on our morals with the Kingdom of God.

MONDAY

When we stand on our two feet and say the Creed we have hardly the leisure any more to add the Amen. "I believe in God the Father Almighty"—we have only that moment for hurling our defiance at the gates of hell. To sit down afterward exactly where we were before, with every resource of heaven at our beck and call, and yet with nothing different, not even yesterday's pet grudge—that is irrelevant, all right, and with a vengeance. The pagan cynics of Roman antiquity used to do infinitely better: they thought themselves commissioned "to heal the soul and free it from its bondage to passion; to be outspoken stewards of good, enduring hardship, living unspotted from the world." There is no point any longer in talking about the kind of faith in God which so many of us have known, or the possibility of its seeing us through these critical years. It cannot be relied on even to see us through the afternoon.

TUESDAY

The ultimate secret of the good life is not restraint. It isn't to be found in the following rules, or in obedience, or

in loyalty; not even in the daily imitation of Christ: the ultimate secret of the good life is hidden away the freedom of a high and unbridled devotion.

WEDNESDAY

I have always remembered with some amusement a woman of my acquaintance who after looking around for something that would really interest her found a book, a thick book, which bore the title *About Ourselves*. It stood there on the table at her side, when I called on her; and she was in bed, where it had helped to put her. It's no good just to keep on feeling your pulse; it's no good feeling your pulse at all if you're constitutionally unable to discover anything but liabilities in your situation. Better look outside then with all your might, and leave the inside strictly alone!

THURSDAY

Let nobody suppose that in order to be a Christian he has to strain after certain moods that never do come naturally to him. Christianity happens not to be a mood. There is no call for any kind of exceptional piety, with folded hands tiptoeing around absent-mindedly through the traffic. What is asked of us is nothing more than the normal response of the human soul, when that soul is untrammelled and free, to the deepest impulses and the highest hopes of its own God-inhabited being. Far from proving to be a denial of life, it is the great, round affirmation of all there is about living by which a man can grow. . . . It is not the will to avoid; it is the will to be: opening its arms as Jesus did, that even sin and death might be sheathed in its body like a sword in its scabbard.

FRIDAY

This death which we proclaim did not transform the world into a place where we can whistle a jaunty tune, as if every story were bound to have our kind of happy ending, and everything at last could be wrapped up in a neat bundle and put away on a tidy shelf. Rather is it a world where tragedy and triumph are so interwrought that we cannot disentangle them: except that in Christ we can see now both the beauty and the terror of life, both the goodness and the severity of God, the fire of his judgment and the solace of his wings, this madness down here held fast in the splendor of that ultimate love.

SATURDAY

That is the moment of revelation, revelation is that moment: when the deep of God calls to the deep of the human soul, and there is answer, with the sound of many waters rushing together.

*Twenty-sixth
Sunday
After
Trinity*

PRAYER

If ever the dark come upon us, O God, our God, let it be thy darkness. And when we hope for the wrong thing, let us wait in that dark until thou canst make us ready for what thou hast promised. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY

God moves ahead with great seven-league boots; and we in bedroom slippers.

MONDAY

Religion is like riding a bicycle: the only safety there is lies in riding! Otherwise you can't even stay on. Momentum is the secret of poise. You'll spend all the days of your pilgrimage being upset, until you learn to fling yourself on such faith as you have, and instead of trying to put up with the wrongs that people do you, swing out to set them right!

TUESDAY

Prayer is the sign and torrent of our wanting!

WEDNESDAY

Joy surprises you in that place beyond the self and all of its business where you quit supposing that things have to go as you like, calling it a problem for faith when they don't. "Why should this happen to me?" Let me put you a tougher one: "Why shouldn't it happen to you?" You remember what happened to Paul and to Jesus before him. Joy can never surprise you until you quit tempting the God you have to be the God you want, and begin allowing him, as far as you are concerned, to be God on his own terms.

THURSDAY

The only guarantee Christ gives us for tomorrow is today, and the memories we are making. We are engaged now in their manufacture; weaving the strands that will hold us, or snap when we need them most! Leaving behind us ghosts in this little house which is today and which next week will be the past; with hands that will keep clutching at us, pulling us back—or pressing us on, as friends would. I wonder just what we're doing about it: if the time will ever come for us when we shall turn around and begin making frantic gestures toward such an hour as this, perhaps, begging it to run up with all the weight it has and fling itself into some bitter fight for us!

FRIDAY

The stark misery that stalks this earth belongs not so much to the will of God as to his Providence. Yet somehow it belongs. It isn't an interruption. It hasn't defeated anything. Maybe it has come because of God's love; because he wants to give us something and can't. When our hands are full and all goes well, he has no place to put it. I don't know. I do know that our spirits are stiff like brocade and self-sufficient when we are quite sure of our course and have in our hands everything we want. When we don't any more, and aren't sure, and there's nothing left to stand between us and him, he isn't proud. I like that way of putting it. He takes us even when everything else is shattered that we preferred before him, and we come at last only because there is "nothing better" now to be had. And he has set a cross to guide us, on the spot where he himself has been.

SATURDAY

Trying to read into that unknown eternity the conditions of time and space which provide the framework of the present is not only naïve and futile; it may be thoroughly disastrous. If you will, please explain to us what happens in the interval between death and resurrection. And when you are through, tell us where on earth—or in any other imaginable place—there will be room for heaven, with some two billion candidates every thirty years or so, to say nothing of all the arrivals since Adam? Even in our day there is no dearth of material at hand for those who, with an irony which so often does no more than save a man's face when he looks in the mirror—how else can he bear it?—are inclined to reduce the whole fantastic notion to wishful thinking, and beyond that to what is so manifestly a logical absurdity.

And all because we are forever bent on reducing to the familiar terms of our own experience what we do not, and in the very nature of things, cannot, know very much about. It is somewhat as if the unborn child, there in the warm and sheltering dark, were asked to dream of what might lie on the other side of the last convulsive shudder which is birth: the glint of the sun on water, the snow flying crazily in the wind, food, the hurly-burly of the world, the flight of planes, flowers blooming, the sound of words, rain dripping from the roof!

*Twenty-seventh
Sunday
After
Trinity*

PRAYER

Show us thy ways, O Lord; teach us thy paths: thou who art always the same in thy coming, yesterday, and today, and forever. On thee do we wait. Amen.

SUNDAY

The plain fact is, we just don't have the last word about these things that happen, and God does! I wonder if you remember Mozart's *Requiem*? He composed it shortly before his death, and said he wanted it played at his funeral. But it wasn't. There was almost no funeral. A storm blew up and nobody came. The few who were there carried his body away like a guilty thing and laid it in a pauper's grave. There is no certain knowledge to this day where he was buried. When thirty-odd years had passed they played his *Requiem* at Beethoven's funeral. How many of us are capable of waiting for the last word? It isn't ours. Capable of leaving what we have been accustomed to call our liabilities where they belong—to the future and to God? Without fingering them all the time, as a man might tell his beads. You don't know yet—and you can't know—where to enter any of them in the ledger: credit side or debit.

MONDAY

Strange we scarcely ever attend to the absurdities of the proposition that "one world at a time" is enough! With an eye to this world only, no man can read clearly the riddle of his own selfhood. He sees himself now as the architect of history, now as its pawn; now as the measure of all things, now as an automatic reflex, a cosmic accident. He is a house divided against itself, split wide open, and hopelessly split. Nor can he read the riddle of what his being here is all about: half of it looks like bread and butter, with a little decent security, and a little decent happiness on the way to it; the other half makes him think now and then that he has missed something, and perhaps ought to go to church and find out what it is. This is to

secularize both the Christian doctrine of man and the Christian doctrine of man's mission under God.

TUESDAY

It's the Christian gospel that gives our lives their setting, nothing else; stands them up against eternity, measures their ways against it, their hopes and their fears; translates us out of an environment where we never were intended to be at home, and makes us *consciously* what we are in *fact*, citizens of another land!

WEDNESDAY

We are living in a world that doesn't belong to us. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." And I've not yet found any evidence to the contrary! All I've ever seen would indicate that it's going to be a dark day for anybody who tries to snatch anything out of that eternal grip! I don't know what it is that we own! This very existence of mine is slipping away from me with every breadth! We do look like guests, somehow, no matter which way we turn!

THURSDAY

This word "wait" is a disturbing word, and not only because so little seems to come of it. More than anything else it's disturbing because it doesn't mean what we think it means! In the Bible it keeps hinting that the postponements are not God's at all: they are ours. Maybe God doesn't seem to be around because underneath everything else there is something in our hearts which doesn't want

him to be, couldn't stand it if he were. Is that the nameless evil which called for Bethlehem, and cost God—Calvary? One thing is very certain: we'll not sit things out! In the face of all that we are, what the Bible means by "waiting" can scarcely have much to do with patiently letting the time pass. There is something in us which makes the waiting necessary: something that forever insists on getting between us and God; something we want more, or like better, that keeps him at a distance.

FRIDAY

There is a road for a man to travel, and a day's work to be done, and a death to overtake—not as something that comes upon you, as you wait there with your cup and your pennies; but like a king's ransom that by the grace of God you've earned! Never wanting to get off, or be spared anything—that's how this epic ends!

SATURDAY

God is the God of life and death. Easter is the affirmation of true life, at the expense of what we call life, which is itself a denial of life. It sets me in a world which is not self-contained, but open at both ends, and drafty: a world far too small for my loyalties, where I am not to be left comfortably alone, finding in running its errands and shoving its furniture about the reason for my being here. Now I have to pick up the stuff from its counters, and take all its goods away from the glare of the artificial lights, and bring them here, and look at them in front of an empty tomb with an angel at the door: instead of just holding fast to my bargains without ever seeing how

shoddy so many of them are. Mark says that the women "went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they were afraid." One can understand why he wrote that; but I keep asking myself, "Afraid of what? Afraid of death, or afraid of life?"

Sources of Biblical Quotations

PAGE	DAY	SOURCE
2	Sunday	Rom. 13:11, 12
2	Monday	I Thess. 5:2
20	Jan. 2	Matt. 2:3
23	Monday	Luke 11:28
25	Friday	Luke 2:29
29	Thursday	Isa. 45:15
30	Saturday	Gal. 3:26
32	Tuesday	Matt. 5:3-8
37	Friday	Luke 23:43
43	Tuesday	Matt. 5:45
49	Thursday	Luke 10:27
49	Friday	Exod. 24:17
53	Friday	Matt. 27:29; Rom. 11:33
53	Saturday	Matt. 23:27, Matt. 5:29; Luke 12:20
57	Friday	Matt. 27:4
65	Wednesday	Job 38:11
67	Saturday	Luke 21:25
73	Tuesday	John 15:5
77	Tuesday	John 10:12
81	Sunday	I Cor. 1:9
85-86	Thursday	Rom. 15:4; Luke 22:42
86	Saturday	I Pet. 1:25
90	Thursday	Matt. 10:39
90	Friday	Luke 11:21, 22
92	Sunday	John 20:27
96	Monday	Job 23:3; Matt. 16:26; Hab. 1:2; Ps. 22:1
97	Wednesday	John 16:33
97	Thursday	Phil. 4:4-7
97	Friday	John 20:2
112	Saturday	I Cor. 11:26
120	Saturday	John 20:21
126	Tuesday	II Cor. 12:9; I Tim. 1:14

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136	Saturday	Isa. 46:9, 10
143	Wednesday	II Cor. 12:9; Rom. 7:24, 25
158	Friday	John 19:30; Luke 23:46
175	Tuesday	I Cor. 4:7
176	Thursday	Matt. 23:37
180	Tuesday	Exod. 14:15
187	Tuesday	Luke 23:33
188	Wednesday	I Cor. 1:9
189	Friday	Matt. 25:35
203	Friday	Gal. 6:2
207	Thursday	II Cor. 12:9
208	Saturday	Luke 12:22

Additional Sources

The list below indicates selections quoted from the expositions of The Book of Job and The Gospel According to St. Luke prepared by Paul Scherer for *The Interpreter's Bible*: volume and opening page number for each quotation are given in the right-hand column.

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124	Saturday	3:909
126	Monday	8:385
127	Wednesday	3:1066
127	Thursday	3:932
128	Saturday	8:389
130	Monday	3:1168
130	Tuesday	8:383
131	Wednesday	3:1172
135	Friday	8:406
138	Sunday	3:1150
138	Monday	8:326
139	Thursday	8:424
142	Monday	8:363
153	Sunday	3:1166
153	Monday	3:1151
153	Tuesday	3:971
154	Thursday	3:955
155	Saturday	3:936
158	Friday	3:958
160	Sunday	3:956

PAGE	DAY	SOURCE
169	Saturday	3:914
171	Sunday	8:364
173	Saturday	3:927
179	Monday	3:980
181	Saturday	3:1174
184	Friday	3:914
185	Saturday	8:364
189	Saturday	3:1135
192	Friday	8:406
198	Sunday	8:396
198	Tuesday	3:1087
202	Tuesday	8:401
206	Sunday	3:1137
206	Tuesday	8:325
206	Wednesday	8:401
210	Tuesday	3:1152
211	Wednesday	8:324
211	Thursday	3:1154
212	Saturday	3:994
218	Sunday	3:1017
220	Saturday	8:352
222	Monday	8:354



Paul Scherer, Brown Professor Emeritus of Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in New York, is a distinguished preacher, teacher and writer. He is the author of *EVENT IN ETERNITY, FOR WE HAVE THIS TREASURE* (The Lyman Beecher Lectures), *FACTS THAT UNDERGIRD LIFE*, etc., and is an editor of *THE INTERPRETER'S BIBLE*. For 25 years he served as minister of Holy Trinity Church (Lutheran), New York City.

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